

JANIE FONDA

MY
LIFE
SO FAR



RANDOM HOUSE

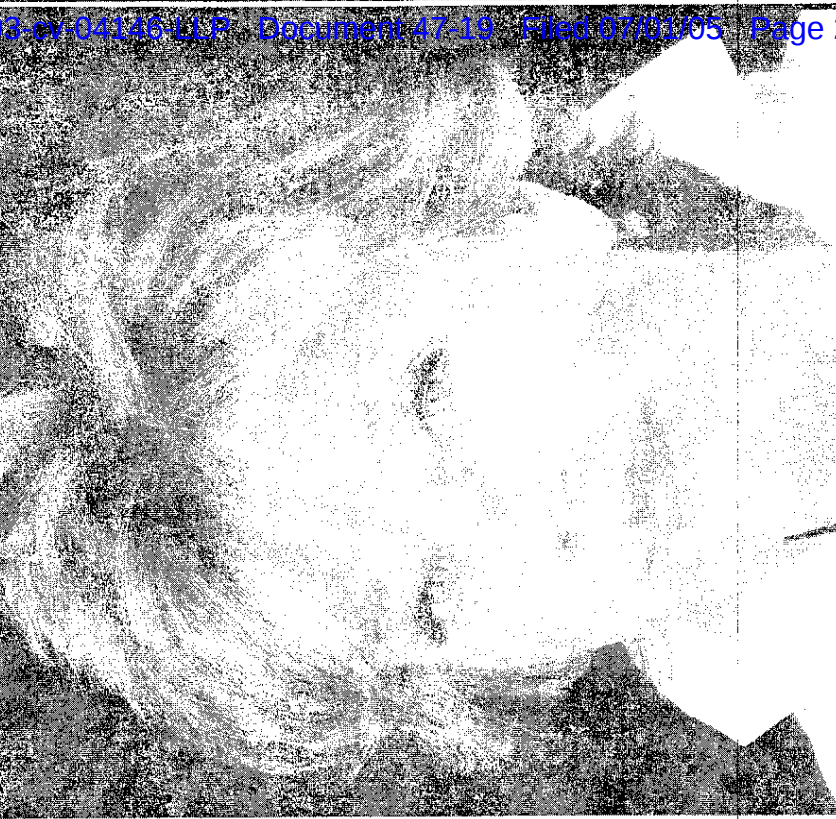
JANIE
FONDA
MY LIFE SO FAR

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JANE FONDA



MY LIFE SO FAR

RANDOM HOUSE  NEW YORK

PREFACE

*If we do not know our own history, we are doomed
to live it as though it were our private fate.*

—HANNAH ARENDT

*The past empowers the present,
and the groping footsteps leading to this present
mark the pathways to the future.*

—MARY CATHERINE BATESON

I was born December 21, the shortest day of the year. I've always seen a year as a circle, with December settled down at the bottom, like 6 on a clock. Then, when the new year starts up again, I see myself moving backward, counterclockwise, till, twelve months later, I've come full circle, back to the bottom again, to that shortest of days. On the day in 1996 when I turned fifty-nine, I realized that, assuming I live to be ninety, give or take, the next full circle would raise the curtain on my third act.

I've had a career both in film and theater for more than forty years, and I know something about third acts. Haven't you ever been to a play where the first two acts seemed confused, then along came the third act and pulled it all together? Ah-ha, you said to yourself. So *that's* what that scene in the first act was leading to! Or, conversely, the first two acts can be brilliant, and then in the third, things disintegrate. However, the third act is definitely key, the payoff that pulls the seemingly random bits and pieces of the first two acts into a coherent whole.

The big difference between life and acting, though, is that in life there's no rehearsal and no "take two." This is it; better get it right before it's over.

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FIRST EDITION

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To have a good third act, you need to understand what the first two have been about. To know where you're going, you must know where you've been. Call me a control freak, but I don't want to be like Christopher Columbus, who didn't know where he was headed when he left, didn't know where he was when he got there, and didn't know where he'd been when he got back. So on my fifty-ninth birthday, I knew I had some serious thinking to do.

In *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott writes, "If you want to make God laugh, tell her your plans." Quite right. But when I talk about figuring out my third act, I'm not talking about making plans. I'm talking about being disciplined enough to learn what my past has to teach me, brave enough to take those lessons into my heart—to own them—and to commit myself to doing what is necessary to make them a part of my future. This is hard.

I once saw a quote from dancer/choreographer Martha Graham framed and hung on a wall in a ballet studio. It said DISCIPLINE IS LIBERATION. At first that seemed like an oxymoron—isn't liberation the opposite of discipline? But discipline here doesn't mean tightness and rigidity, or punishment for wrongdoing. It means being so committed and so fully contained that you can let go; so deeply connected that you can detach; so strong that you can be gentle. Liberation takes intentionality, deliberation, courage, and—yes—discipline.

I think of the tremendous discipline it took the great ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev to be temporarily liberated from gravity and soar through the air. I think of Greg Maddux, for many years the Atlanta Braves' outstanding pitcher, and the discipline that went into his ability to stand on the mound at the bottom of the ninth inning of the World Series and be physically and mentally relaxed.

For me, discipline, liberation, means acknowledging my demons, banishing them to the corner, seeing my past and excising the old patterns and baggage to make room for stillness. It is within stillness that I will hear the small voice and know where it is leading me. Call that voice what you will, but it has always been there, although during my second act—and in much of my first, for that matter—it was too risky for me to hear it.

It is taking discipline to liberate myself into a quieter third act, discipline in order to live with the awareness of my death.

I don't want to die without knowing who I am.

Remember those toys where you'd drop some hard, dry kernel thing into a glass of water and it would expand into an underwater landscape of mystery and color? Well, for me, to be disciplined and to live with the awareness of death means taking every minute and dropping it into a glass of water and having it swell into something fuller, more complete.

To understand why I decided to prepare this way for my third act, I have to take you back a few years, to my forties. My father was dying. I would sit by his bedside in silence for long periods of time hoping that he would talk to me, say something about what he was thinking and feeling as he was being rocked away from us to that eternal place. He never did.

If he couldn't come to me, I would go to him. I would focus on his face and try to put myself inside his body, become him. I remember feeling so profoundly sad for him—not that he was dying, but that he had never really been able to get close to me or to my brother, Peter. I felt sure he must regret that. I would if I were him.

This experience taught me that I was not afraid of dying. What I am terrified of, however, is getting to that place right at the edge of life when there's no time left, being filled with regrets, and having no time to set things right.

Of course we always have regrets—things we've done that we wish we could take back or erase. I have significant ones that will haunt me forever, which I hope I have been brave enough to confront in this book. But it's what you *didn't* do that you know you *should* have done, rather than what you *did* do that you *shouldn't* have done, that's the worst, the if-onlys and what-ifs.

"Why didn't I tell her how much I love her?"

"If only I'd been brave enough to address that old fear of mine.

I began thinking a great deal about these things in my late fifties. I had begun to go through deep inner changes—changes that I didn't fully understand until I began writing this book. I realized then that to avoid regrets, I would have to start, while I was still healthy and strong, to name what those might be—and to do something about them. I needed to live consciously, and I knew it would mean facing things that frightened me—like intimacy.

All this washed over me on my fifty-ninth birthday, in 1996. It was now or never. Fish or cut bait. In a year I would be sixty. One friend

mine said she slept through her sixtieth; another said he "went into hiding." Now, don't get me wrong. I hate getting old—it's a vanity and joints thing. But I knew that I would have to do what I usually do when I'm scared of something: sidle up to it, get to know it, and make it my friend. I have made the truism "Know thine enemy" work for me many times over the years. For instance, when I was in my forties, knowing that I was approaching menopause and the inevitable changes that would bring, I spent two years researching and writing a book with my friend Mignon McCarthy, called *Women Coming of Age*, about how women can prepare for menopause and the aging process. When the changes did begin (much later than I had anticipated), I was prepared. I knew what was negotiable and what wasn't.

With all this in mind, I decided to fully embrace my upcoming sixtieth birthday by exploring what my life had been about up until then. Doing this changed me in ways I would never have foreseen. Coming to see my various individual struggles within a broader societal context enabled me to understand that much of my journey was a universal one for women—played out in different ways and with different outcomes, perhaps, but with common core experiences. This is what liberated me to write this book.

I also realized that it was time to talk about my personal experiences during the last five years of the Vietnam War. I want to do this partly to set the record straight but mostly because of what my experiences during those years taught me—about myself, about courage, about redemption. The most important of these lessons came from U.S. servicemen, from whom I learned that although we may enter the heart of darkness, if we are brave enough to face and then speak our truth, we can change and be set free.

Much has been said (not always in a friendly way) about the many variations of my life and how they have played themselves out in public; about the varied personas I seem to have taken on, the new faces that seemed to come with each new man in my life. I understand—now—what that was all about, and I explore it in this book. I hope that other women might see something of their own experiences in what I have to say about how a girl can lose touch with herself, her body, and have to struggle—hard—to get herself, her voice, back. Also, I believe that change can be a good thing, *if* you are fully in each phase and *if* the changes represent growth. For better or worse, I have been fully invested

in each phase of my life, and I'm glad, because it enabled me to learn and grow. I hope this book will infuse the saying "Life is the journey, not the destination" with flesh and blood, because I believe that it is more joyful to embrace and be in the journey than to assume you'll ever "arrive."

My life has been marked not only by change but by discontinuity. Bucking social, familial, and professional expectations, I never focused on a pot at the end of my rainbow, and I now think this *lack* of early focus is one of the things that saved me. Had I, out of fear or laziness or "normalcy," done a freeze-frame on my earlier self, the self that wanted approval, well, I can tell you with certainty that I'd be sleeping through this third act . . . probably with the help of pills.

I feel that the very changing nature of my life helps to make my story relevant to other people and also to this modern era. Everything about our world today speaks to the need for flexibility and improvisation, yet young people still feel pressure to do life the way their parents did: deciding early on what they want to be when they grow up and committing to it. They feel there must be something wrong with them when it doesn't work out that way. We're brought up waiting for closure (when I graduate, when I get married, when I know what I want to do and become a grown-up), and we expect contentment to follow. Youthful dreams then give way to "reality" and we succumb to what is rather than striving for *what if*. Consistency can be a trap, especially if it leads to being consistently wrong rather than to stopping, admitting your mistake, and changing course.

One thing is for sure—the genie of "continual flux" is out of the bottle. Tectonic shifts in our global socio-psycho-economic realities have made constant change the norm—consistently! I believe in the words of the Sufi poet Rumi: "The alchemy of a changing life is the only truth." Certainly, my own life is proof that flux is often creative, enlivening.

I have structured this book into three acts. The first act I call "Gathering," because it was in those first thirty years of my life that I took in all that had made me *me*—the tools, the experiences, and the scars. I would spend the next two acts recovering from, and also building upon. The first act is also when I gathered resilience.

The second act I call "Seeking," because that is when I turned my eyes outward and began a search in the world, for meaning beyond the narrow confines of myself and my immediate life, asking, What am I here for? What are other people's lives like? Can I make it better?

The final act is called "Beginning," because—well, that's what it feels like.

While the high visibility of my public life has not always brought personal peace and happiness, it has lent a certain universal quality to my various metamorphoses. In the course of my writing, I have realized that perhaps I can use this to advantage: I can peel back the surface layers of events with which you, the reader, already have an association and invite you to see them through a new lens, with new eyes.

I moved "out of myself"—my body—early on and have spent much of my life searching to come home . . . to be embodied. I didn't understand this until I was in my sixties and had started writing this book. I have come to believe that perhaps my purpose in life is to show you—through my own journey—how and why this "disembodiment" happens, especially to women, and how, by moving back inside ourselves, we can restore balance—not just within ourselves but on the planet. I discovered that being disembodied rendered me incapable of intimacy, and so halfway through my second act, I went on a search for that.

I have dedicated this book to my mother. For me, this is a big deal—a way for me to begin to restore my own balance. You see, I have spent most of my life feeling and acting like an Immaculate Conception in reverse: born of a man, without aid of woman. For reasons you will come to understand, I have spent far too much energy obliterating all in my life that represented my mother. This has taken a profound toll. Dedicating this book to her marks another turning point in my attempt to live a full, conscious life.

So here's to you, dear reader. And here's to you, Frances Ford Seymour, my mother—you did the best you could. You gave me life; you gave me wounds; you also gave me part of what I needed to grow stronger at the broken places.

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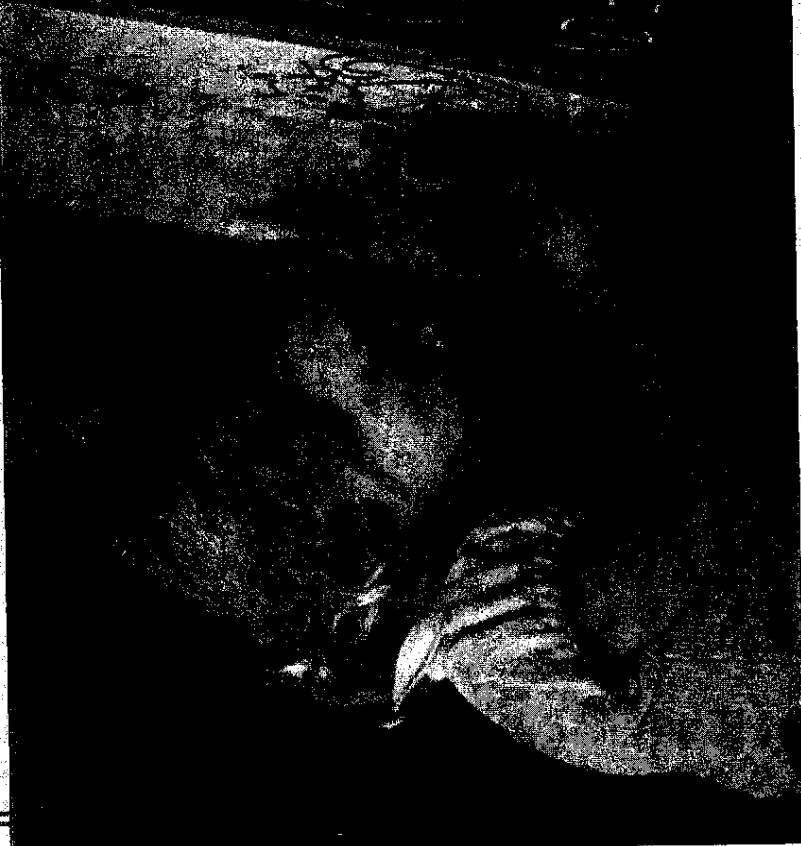
ACT ONE

GATHERING

Everything is gestation and then birthing.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE,
Letters to a Young Poet

At age two, totally focused.



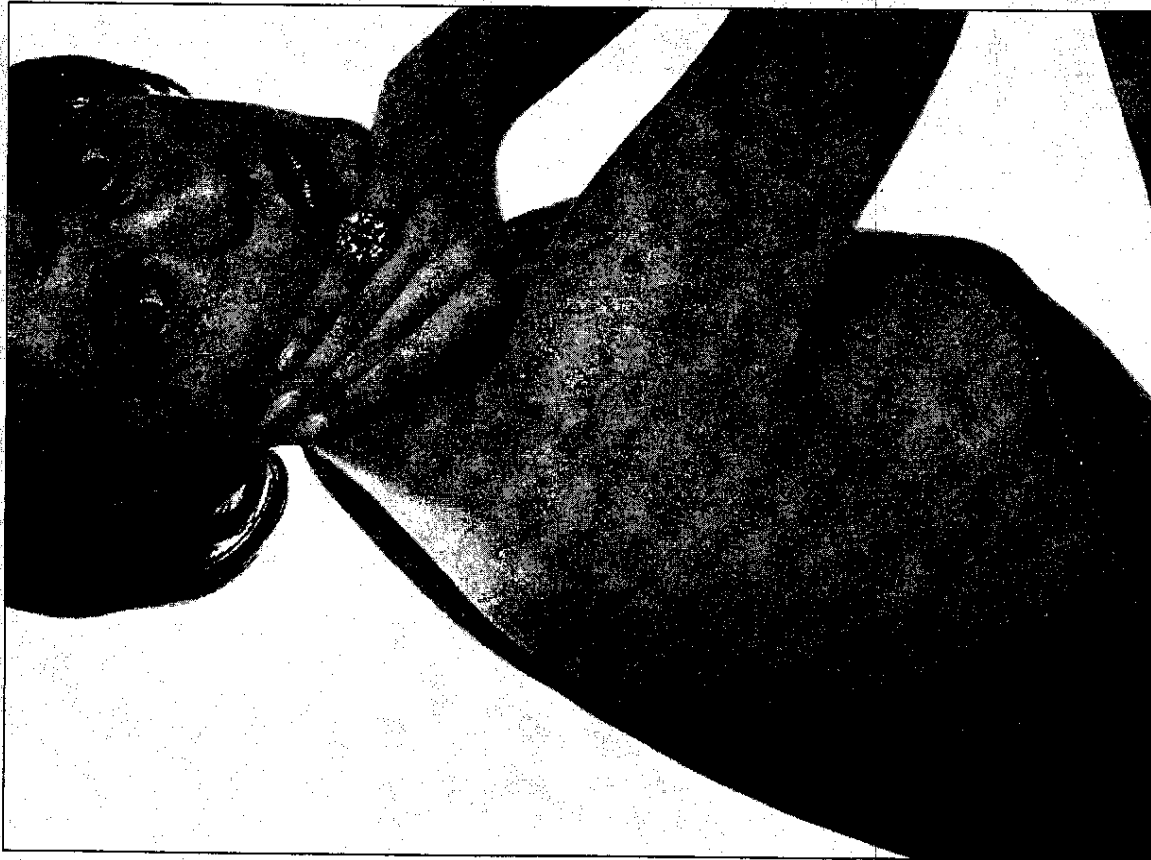
Already the dead-serious
Lone Ranger.



Plain Jane with bad hair.

A brief stint with the jet set
at about nineteen.
(Yale Joel/Time & Life Pictures
Getty Images)

With Dean Jones in Any Wednesday.
(PhotoFest)



My photograph for Harper's Bazaar by Richard Avedon, 1960.
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CHAPTER ONE

BUTTERFLY

Stay near me—do not take thy flight!

A little longer stay in sight!

Much converse do I find in thee,

Historian of my infancy!

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH,

"To a Butterfly"

I SAT CROSS-LEGGED on the floor of the tiny home I'd created out of cardboard boxes. The walls were so high that all I could see if I looked up was the white-painted tongue-and-groove ceiling of the glassed-in porch so common in Connecticut in the 1940s. The porch ran the entire length of the house and smelled of mildew. Light from the windows bounced off the ceiling down to where I sat, so I didn't need a lamp as I worked on the saddle. I was eleven years old.

It was an English saddle, my half sister Pan's, from the time before she'd gotten married, sold her horse, and moved to New York City—from the time when we still believed things would work out all right.

I held the saddle on my lap, rubbing saddle soap into the beautiful, rich leather, over and over. . . . *Make it better. I know I can make it better.* The smell of saddle soap was comforting. So was the smallness of my home. This was a place where I could be sure of things. No one was allowed in here but me—not my brother, Peter, not anyone. Everything was always arranged just so—the saddle, the soap, the soft rags folded carefully, and my book of John Masefield poems. Neatness was important . . . something to count on.

Mother was home for a while and if I leaned forward ever so



Barbarella between takes.

slightly, I could look out my "door" down the length of the porch, to where she sat at an oilcloth-covered table on which stood a Mason jar. A butterfly would be beating its wings frantically against the glass walls of the jar, and I could see my mother pick up a cotton ball with tweezers, dip it into a bottle of ether, unscrew the top of the jar, and carefully drop in the ether-soaked ball. After a minute, I could see the butterfly's wings begin to slow their mad fluttering, until gradually they would stop moving altogether. *Peace*. A whiff of ether drifted down to where I sat, making me think of the dentist. I knew just what the butterfly felt, because whenever I went to have my braces tightened, the nurse would put a mask over my nose and tell me to breathe deeply. In no time the edges of my body would begin to disappear. Sound would come to me from far away and I would feel a wonderful, cosmic abandon as I fell backward down a dark hole, like Alice to Wonderland. Oh, I wished that I could make that sensation last forever. I didn't feel sorry at all for the butterfly.

After a while, mother would unscrew the lid; gently remove the butterfly with the long tweezers; carefully, lovingly, pierce its body with a pin; and mount it on a white board on the wall above the table. There were at least a dozen of them up there, different kinds of swallowtails, a southern dogface, a red admiral, a clouded sulphur, and a monarch. I never could decide which one was my favorite.

Once she took me with her to a meadow full of wildflowers and tall grasses where she went to catch her butterflies. There was still an abundance of wild places—swamps, unexplored forests, and meadows—in Greenwich, Connecticut, in the 1940s. I watched as she moved through the grass—her blond, sun-blushed hair blowing in the wind—swooping down with her green net, then flipping the net quickly to close off the butterfly's escape route. I would help her get it safely into a jar and quickly screw the top on.

It puzzled me a little why Mother had decided to take up butterfly collecting. I don't remember her ever doing this when we lived in California. I was the one fascinated with butterflies. I was always painting pictures of them. When I was ten, right before we'd moved from California, I gave my father a drawing for his birthday. "Butterflies by Jane Fonda" was written up in the right-hand corner, and then two rows of them with their names written underneath in my tight, straight-up-and-down-careful-not-to-reveal-anything handwriting. My letter said:

May 19, 1948.

Dear Dad,

I did not trace these drawings of butterflies. I hope you had a happy birthday. I heard you on the Bing Crosby program. Every two days I will send you another picture of butterflies.

Love, Jane.

By the time Mother took up the butterfly hobby, I had turned eleven. Peter was nine, and we were living in our second rented house in Connecticut. It was a rambling two-story wood house perched atop a steep hill overlooking a tollgate on the Merritt Parkway. I could look out my bedroom window and count the cars. Prior to the move east, we'd grown up in California's Santa Monica Mountains and, instead of a tollgate, we looked out onto the vast, shimmering Pacific Ocean. Maybe that is why my childhood fantasies of conquering all the enemies of the world were so expansive. Had I grown up overlooking the tollgate, I might have seen myself as an accountant.

This new house was on a large piece of property bordered to the west by an immense hardwood forest that, in the winter, became a leafless gray fortress. Then in the spring, dogwood would bloom, hopeful and white through the layered forest gray, and redbud would add slashes of magenta. By May, an array of greens would transform the woods once again. For someone who had spent the first ten years of her life sea-sonless in California, this ever-changing palette seemed miraculous.

The house had an uncomfortable Charles Addams-y quality about it, always too dark and chilly, and it had far more rooms than there were people living there, which added a sense of impermanence and awkwardness to its hilltop perch. There was Grandma Seymour (Mother's mother), Peter, me, and a Japanese-American maid named Katie. Peter says Katie's familiar presence with us after three years was comforting to him. I, on the other hand, barely remember her. But then Peter got more attached to people than I did. I was the Lone Ranger.

Mother wasn't with us much anymore, though I didn't know why. It was during one of the periods when she was back from wherever it was she went that the butterfly collection was started. Maybe someone had suggested that she get herself a hobby. Peter and I had stopped paying much attention to her being away, or at least I had. It had simply become a fact of our lives: Mother would be there, and then she wouldn't. When

she wasn't there, and even when she was, Grandma Seymour would be in charge of us. Grandma was a strong woman, a constant presence in our early lives. But though I loved her, I don't remember ever running joyfully into her arms the way my own grandchildren do with me. I don't remember her ever imparting grandmotherly wisdom or even being fun to be with. She was a more formal, stalwart presence. But she was always there to meet our external needs.

Around the house there'd be an occasional murmured mention of a hospital or of an illness, and right after we'd moved to Greenwich, Mother had been in Johns Hopkins Hospital for a long time, for an operation on a dropped kidney. Grandma took Peter and me to visit her there once, and I remember Mother telling me they'd almost cut her in half. But she'd been "ill" and in hospitals so much that it had lost any real meaning. Hospitals were supposed to make you well so you could come home and *stay*.

Ever since we had moved to Greenwich I had spent a lot of time in hospitals myself—me, the healthy one. I'd developed blood poisoning, then chronic ear infections; then I started breaking bones. My arm was broken the first time during a wrestling match with a boy, Teddy Wahl, the son of the man who ran the nearby Round Hill Stables and Riding Club. Teddy threw me against a stall door. It hurt, but I walked home and didn't say anything—between Peter and Mother, we had enough hypochondriacs in the house. I was not going to complain. Instead, I sat in front of the black-and-white TV to watch *The Howdy Doody Show*, my favorite because it regularly included a short *Lone Ranger* film.

I sat carefully on my hands, as I always did when Dad was home, because I was scared he would see that I was still biting my fingernails. As we sat down to eat, Dad asked me if I'd washed my hands, and when I told him I hadn't, he exploded in anger, pulled me out of my seat and into the bathroom, turned on the faucet, took the broken arm (which I'd been holding limply by my side), and thrust it under the water. I passed out. He'd no idea that I was hurt and was very apologetic as he rushed me to the hospital, where my arm was X-rayed and put into a cast. The worst part was that all this happened right before school started, my first year at the all-girls Greenwich Academy—just at the time when everybody would be checking out who was cool (we called it "neat" back then), who was good at field hockey, and whom they wanted to be friends with, I had to show up with my arm in a cast.

At the time, Dad was starring in the Broadway smash hit *Mister Roberts*. I now realize that I must have sensed that something was very wrong between my parents. Palpable tension was in the air: Dad's anger and black moods; Mother's increasing absences. Even if I had had the words to express what I "knew," I'd already learned that no one would listen to words that spoke about feelings. So instead, my body was sending out distress signals.

There's a set of photos of us taken around that time. Just after we left California, *Harper's Bazaar* had come out to interview Dad and take pictures of the family "picnicking"—one of those setup jobs that make the children of movie stars feel like props. The pictures show us sitting on the lawn: Dad, Mother, Peter, me, and Pan (my half sister, the one with the saddle), who at sixteen was beautiful and remarkably voluptuous.

There is one photograph in particular that says it all. I discovered it in a scrapbook many years of therapy later, when I was able to see it with more perception and compassion. Dad is in the foreground leaning back on his elbows, looking as if he's got something really good going on in his head that has nothing to do with all of us. I am kneeling next to him, looking intently at him, as I often did in our family pictures, showing clearly whose side I was on. Behind me Peter is playing with the cat, and Pan is lounging glamorously. And then, in the background, almost like an outsider, there's Mother, leaning forward toward us with an expression of pain and anxiety on her face. I feel so sad when I look at that face which I've done often with a magnifying glass.

Why couldn't I have known? Why wasn't I nicer? I was ten years old. Dad had come out of the navy at the end of World War II and (what felt like) the very next day had gone off to New York to start rehearsals for *Mister Roberts* while we stayed in California. When it became clear that the play was in for a long run, Mother decided to put our home up for sale and move east. She settled on Greenwich, thinking that the thirty-five-minute train or car ride from New York City would make weekend commutes easy for Dad. Plus, in that well-heeled Connecticut enclave, there would be homes to rent on large enough pieces of property so that Peter and I could continue our habit of roaming the outdoors. My parents were at least right about that part.

I don't remember Dad being around much after we moved to Greenwich. When he was there, I could almost feel his energy pulling him back toward New York, though I didn't really know why. I supposed it

was just that Mother, Peter, and I weren't all that interesting. When he'd visit us I could sense that he didn't really want to be there. But Dad had been an Eagle Scout, and the commitment to doing one's duty was embedded in his DNA. I wish the Scouts had taught him how to make it seem less like a duty.

Sometimes Dad would come out on a Sunday and take Peter and me fishing for flounder in nearby Long Island Sound. Dad was usually in a bad mood, which meant these excursions weren't exactly "fun times," but I enjoyed them anyway—all of us together in the little rented motorboat, the salty smells mixed with engine fumes, the anticipation as we'd pull out of the harbor, round the buoy, and head to sea. Because flounder are bottom feeders, we'd never go out very far before Dad would turn off the motor and tell us to bait our hooks. This was always the moment of reckoning.

Baiting the hook meant reaching into a bucket filled with reddish brown kelp, among which writhed long reddish brown bloodworms with what appeared to be claws in their heads. Peter didn't like them at all. Peter, in fact, would refuse to touch them—which in itself took guts. Dad wouldn't even try to disguise the disgust he felt about Peter's squeamishness, and his moods would get blacker and blacker. Whereupon the Lone Ranger, would ride to the rescue and be man enough for both of us. I'd pick up that worm and stick the hook right through its squirming head without even a shudder. I didn't do this to make Peter look bad; I loved my brother. I just wanted to prove my toughness to Dad and make the tension go away.

Peter was who he was. When he was scared he showed it; if he was sick, he'd complain about it—damn the consequences. I often wished he'd pretend like I did, just to make things easier. But, no, Peter was himself. And I, well, I'd gotten into the habit of leaving myself behind someplace in order to win Dad's approval. *Make things better. I know I can make things better.*

Once, Dad had us come into the city and took us to the circus. A New York columnist, Radie Harris, who knew our family, was also there and was quoted as saying:

I remember sitting in a box at the circus a few months after Mister Roberts opened. Hank sat just to my right. With him were Jane and Peter, and not once during the entire performance did he say a word to



A faux family picnic in Greenwich for Harper's Bazaar magazine. That's Mother in the background.

(Genevieve Naylor/Corbis)

either child. And either the children knew enough to say nothing, or they might have been too intimidated to speak. He didn't buy them hot dogs, cotton candy, or treat them to souvenirs. When the circus was over, they simply stood up and walked out. I felt sorry for all three of them.

Then one day, when I'd just finished breakfast and was heading out the door to school, I saw that Mother was standing at the entrance to the living room. She motioned me to come to her. "Jane," she said, "if anyone tells you that your father and I are getting divorced, tell them you already know."

That was it. And off to school I went.

I had realized the year before that parents getting divorced didn't mean that you, the child, would fall through a crack in the floor and no one would ever look for you again. Some of my friends had divorced parents and seemed to have survived just fine. I do remember that day at school feeling a little out of body, as if I'd had some of the dentist's ether, but I also felt oddly important and deserving of special attention. Divorces were fairly uncommon in those days.

A few days after "divorce" had been uttered (only to me, not to Peter) I was lying on Mother's bed with her and she asked if I wanted to see her scar from her recent kidney operation. I didn't really want to. But since she'd asked, I felt she needed to show it to me and that I shouldn't say no. She pulled up her satin pajama top and lowered the pants and there . . . oh, horror—that's why they were getting divorced! Who would want to live with someone who'd been cut in half and had a thick, wide pink scar that ran all around her waist? It was terrifying.

"I've lost all my stomach muscle," she said sadly. "Doesn't that look awful?" What did she want me to say, that it wasn't bad? Or did she want me to agree with her?

"And look at this," she said, showing me one of her breasts. The nipple was all distorted. I felt so bad for her—it must have hurt so much—but I also didn't want to be her daughter. I wanted to wake up and discover I was adopted. I wanted a mother who looked healthy and beautiful, at whom a father would want to look when she had no clothes on. Maybe then he'd want to stay at home. This was all her fault.

I think it was around that time, maybe right there on that bed, that I vowed I would do whatever it took to be perfect so that a man would

love me. Fifty-three years later, Pan told me that Mother had had a botched breast implant. I guess Mother had tried to be perfect, too. I will return to the sad topic of breast implants in act two.

Howard Teichmann, who wrote my father's authorized biography, *My Life*, wrote that when Dad told my mother he wanted a divorce, she said, "Well, all right, Hank. Good luck, Hank."

In retrospect, Fonda says, "I've got to tell you she was absolutely wonderful. . . . She accepted it. She was sympathetic. She couldn't have been more understanding."

Yeah, sure. Mother was acting by the rules. If she could love the right way—selflessly, with understanding and no anger—perhaps Dad would come back to her. In private, though, she was disintegrating. She hacked off her hair with nail scissors and, while staying in a friend's New York apartment, walked the neighborhood in her nightgown.

In those days, I too walked in my nightgown, but in my sleep, always propelled by the same nightmare: I was in the wrong room and desperately needed to get out, get back to where I was supposed to be. It was dark and cold and I never could find the door. In my sleep I would actually move large pieces of furniture around my bedroom trying to find the way out, and then, because it was futile, I would give up and get back in bed. The next morning the furniture would have to be moved back into place. It was a nightmare that stayed with me—albeit with variations on where I was trying to get to—until I married Ted Turner, when I was fifty-four.

One of my most vivid memories of that time was sitting in silence at the dinner table in that spooky house on the hill—Peter, Grandma, Mother, and me. Through the window I could see the gray March landscape. Mother, at the head of the table, was crying silently into her food. It was spinach and Spam. We ate a lot of canned food in those days, as though the war and food rationing were still going on. I used to wonder about this, but now I know that Mother was terrified of running out of money and not receiving anything from Dad in the divorce.

No one said anything about the fact that Mother was crying. Maybe we feared that if one of us put words to what we saw and heard, life would implode into an unfathomable sadness so heavy the air wouldn't bear it. Not even after we left the table was anything said. Grandma never took us aside to explain what was happening. Perhaps if "it" was

not named, "it" would not exist. Peter and I went to our rooms as always, to do our homework. The dinner scene got buried in a graveyard somewhere next door to my heart, and the habit of not dealing with feelings became embedded in another generation.

But life goes on, as life does—until it doesn't, especially when you're in the discovery mode of an eleven-year-old. That year I managed to take a horse over a four-foot jump for the first time and became obsessed with the card game canasta. And Brooke Hayward and I began a successful writing partnership that won us "Best Short Story" awards at Greenwich Academy.

Within walking distance of the house was a riding stable—not the big one where Teddy Wahl broke my arm, but a small one with only an outdoor riding ring, where I often took jumping lessons on a borrowed white horse named Silver. My best friend, Diana Dunn, took lessons there, too. We both adored the teacher, a cozy Irishman named Mike Carroll. Next to being inside my cardboard "home" with my sister's saddle, this was where I most liked to be. Horses were my passion, my escape.

Grandma told me many years later that it was around this time that Mother had been moved, on the advice of her doctors, from the Austen Riggs Center, a more open residence for the affluent "mentally afflicted" in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to the Craig House sanitarium in Beacon, New York. The doctors said that her emotional deterioration and suicidal tendencies required she be under constant guard. Grandma was with her for the move and told me that Mother was in a straitjacket and didn't recognize her. I can't manage to wrap my mind around that image of Mother in a straitjacket, or what Grandma's anguish must have been.

One day Mother came home accompanied by a uniformed nurse. I refused to see her. I was playing jacks with Peter on the hardwood floor upstairs when she arrived in a limousine. Grandma called for us to come down.

"Peter." I grabbed his arm. "Don't go down. I'm not going to. Let's just stay up here and play jacks. I'll let you win. Okay?"

"No, I'm going." Peter said, and he went downstairs.

Why didn't I go down? Was I so angry with her for not being there for us? Was it I'll-show-you-I-don't-need-you-either?

I never saw her again.

She must have known it would be her last time home. She'd come, I guess, to say good-bye—but also to get the small razor that she kept in a

black enamel box given to her years before by her friend Eulalia Chapin. Apparently, she had rushed upstairs and just managed to slip the razor into her purse when the nurse, who'd been sent to make sure such a thing didn't happen, caught up to her.

A month later, in April, on her forty-second birthday, Mother wrote six notes—one each to Peter, Pan, and me; one to her mother; one to her nurse, telling her not to go into the bathroom but to call the doctor; and one to the doctor, her psychiatrist: "Dr. Bennett, you've done everything possible for me. I'm sorry, but this is the best way out."

Then she went into her bathroom in the Craig House sanitarium, carefully withdrew the razor she'd managed to keep hidden, and cut her throat. She was still alive when Dr. Bennett arrived, but she died a few minutes later.

The fluttering slowed; the wings grew still. Then peace.

I came home from school that afternoon, and as I walked through the front door, Grandma called down to me from her bedroom at the top of the stairs.

"Jane, something's happened to your mother. She's had a heart attack. Your father is on his way here right now. Please stay in the house and wait for him. Don't go out."

I turned right around, ran out the door, and ran all the way to the stables, where I was to have a riding lesson. I don't remember feeling anything at all, though I must have known something serious was happening, because Dad didn't just travel out from the city unexpectedly on a weekday.

In the middle of my lesson the phone in the stable rang. It was Dad telling whoever answered to make me come home immediately. But I took my time. There were so many dead bugs and interesting rocks in the dirt driveway that I needed to stop and examine. Eventually, when I could find no more ways to stall, I trudged up the hill. A strange car was parked at the bottom of the steps. Must be Dad's rental, I thought with a shudder. In some deep part of me that wasn't my mind, some part that could keep secrets from the rest of me, I knew what was coming. My conscious mind knew this was all a dream, that I was about to wake up. Nobody opened the heavy front door and walked into the living room. Nobody had turned on any lights, and the room seemed grayer than usual. Dad

and Grandmother were sitting up very straight, each on a different couch, facing each other. Dad took me on his lap and told me that my mother had had a heart attack and was dead.

Dead. Now, there's a word. Short, heavy. I felt myself holding it in my hands, like a brick. *Dead, like the butterflies mounted on that board on the other side of the living room wall. Her jars and tweezers were lying spread around on the table out there. I'd seen them only yesterday when I'd gone to polish the saddle. She couldn't be dead. She hadn't put her things away. Maybe I was dreaming.* Then I was outside my body looking back at myself, waiting for myself to react. Everything was familiar, yet nothing was the same. From another room came the loud ticking of a clock—jarring, wrong. Didn't it know that time no longer mattered? I noticed wrinkles in the chintz slipcovers and tried to smooth them out. *Make it better. I know I can make it better.*

Peter came home a few minutes later. Dad got up and switched seats with Grandma, taking Peter on his lap and repeating the story to him. I had to get away from all of them, to be by myself, try to get myself back into my body, figure out how I felt.

"Excuse me, please. I'm going to my room."

I could hear Peter crying as I followed myself upstairs. Sitting on the edge of my bed, *I wondered why I couldn't cry, like Peter. "Mother's dead. I will never see her again."* I said it over and over to myself, trying to bring up some tears. But I felt nothing.

I remembered that I had stayed upstairs the day she'd come home for the last time. *Why hadn't I gone down to see her?* I felt something begin to stir in my chest. *Ah, here it comes. I'm normal.* But the feeling skittered away and I went outside myself again, and again I went numb.

When I was in my forties and the tears for Mother did finally come—unexpectedly and for no apparent reason—they were unstoppable. They came from so deep within me that I feared I wouldn't survive them, that my heart would crack open, and like Humpty-Dumpty, I'd never be able to be put back together again.

Grandmother and Dad arranged to have Mother cremated, and then Dad drove back into the city in time for his performance of *Mister Roberts*. Didn't miss a beat. I don't think this implied he didn't feel anything; it's just that Dad didn't know how to deal with feelings or to process pain. He knew only how to cover it up. Or maybe he'd grown numb, like me. Maybe I learned it from him.

As soon as Dad left the house, I went into Mother's room and found a favorite purse of hers, with its special lipstick smell. On the bedside table lay her dog-eared copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Everywhere—on the floor of her closet, in her coat pocket—there were pieces of her unfinished—never to be finished—life. In the medicine cabinet all the little bottles were lined up: FRANCES FONDA, with dates of expiration—but *she'd expired first*—lined up like orphans. Like me. Would they be thrown out now? Would I?

My girlhood friend Diana Dunn told me recently that her father said to her, "Jane's mother has just died and we have to go to her house and bring her here." Dad or Grandmother must have called and told him. Diana says I stayed with them for several days, but *not one word* was ever spoken about Mother's death. "You never cried," she said. "I felt fear then. Your mother had just died and I didn't understand why no one said anything to you. You were my best friend. I loved you and I didn't know what to do for you."

Never in all the subsequent years, all the way to his own death, did Dad and I ever mention Mother. I was afraid it would upset him. I was sure he felt guilty because he'd asked for the divorce. *Make it better. I don't even know if he knew that I knew the heart attack story wasn't true.* Don't ask, don't tell. Peter, on the other hand, wore it all on both sleeves. The following Christmas, eight months after her death, Dad came up from New York City to open presents with us in Greenwich where we were being looked after by Grandma and Katie, the maid. Peter had filled an entire wingback chair with presents for Mother and a letter he'd written to her. Looking back, it is so terribly sad and poignant, an eleven-year-old boy needing to let his mother know he loved her and missed her and wanted people to acknowledge her. But, oh God, nothing he could have done could have made that Christmas Day any worse. He was furious with Peter and sided with Dad, who seemed to see Peter's behavior as a play for sympathy. What a thought!

In the week that followed Mother's death, my seventh-grade teachers seemed to go out of their way to be kind and understanding. I became aware that the rap on me was just what I had hoped: that I was remarkably brave and took everything in stride. What was really happening, though, was that I was getting psychic perks for shutting down. What had been a tendency for most of my young life was now being praised, and I began to hone this into a fine art: *You don't really feel what*

you feel; you didn't really hear what you heard. It's not that I consciously did these things—buried them. It's just that I'd been doing it for so long that I had begun to live that way. I simply didn't know anymore what I knew or wanted or thought or felt—or even who I was in an embodied way. I would become whatever I felt the people whose love and attention I needed wanted me to be. I would try to be perfect. It was safer there. It was a survival mechanism that served me well—back then.

CHAPTER TWO

MY BLUE GENES

*And yet they, who passed away long ago, still exist in us, as predisposition,
as burden upon our fate, as murmuring blood,
and as gesture that rises up from the depths of time.*

—RAINER MARIA RILKE,
Letters to a Young Poet

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER,
Requiem for a Nun

MOTHER

SHE WAS AN ICON, always at the center of things, and, boy, did she love life! Listening to the voice at the other end of the line, I thought this woman must be a little batty to have seen Mother as an icon!

The woman speaking was Laura Clark. She had worked for Elizabeth Arden in New York in the mid-1930s, modeling tea gowns for Arden clients while they were getting their beauty treatments. One day she walked into the room where my mother, a regular at Arden's, had just finished getting a facial. Mother took one look at the beautiful young girl and, instead of asking about the tea gown, offered her a cup of tea.

"My goodness," said Mother. "You look exhausted. Come over here and sit down." Whereupon they struck up a conversation that led to a lifelong friendship.

Laura Clark had been trying to reach me for more than twenty years, to talk to me about my mother; it turned out. In the seventies she

had even gone backstage after my father's Broadway play *First Monday in October* to ask him how she could contact me. "Try the police!" he'd told her brusquely, referring to my controversial activism.

I vaguely remembered getting letters from a Laura Clark, but when I'd come to the sentence where she'd say she had been a friend of my mother's, I'd toss the letter away. Mother, as far as I was concerned, had no place in my life. Now, after many years, another letter had arrived from Laura, giving me a number to call if I wanted to talk. She had no way of knowing that I had decided to write this book, that I had reached a point when I knew I would need, at last, to understand my mother. I was sitting at my desk writing when I made the decision to pick up the phone and call her. I was ready. Or so I thought.

Laura's soft voice was describing a woman I don't remember knowing. "Your mother took me under her wing and invited me to the wonderful parties she gave at her Long Island estate and at the club El Morocco. Men just fell over themselves when they saw her. She'd cast those slanted eyes at a man across the room and he couldn't resist."

"Wasn't she married?" I asked. "Was her daughter, Pan, already born?"

"She was a widow when we met. Her first husband, George Brokaw, had just died and their daughter must have been a couple of years old."

Laura went on to describe how later, during World War II, Laura had moved to Los Angeles with her young son, Danny, to find work.

"Of course, by then your mother and father had married and you and Peter were young children. Your mother found me an apartment, took me to parties like she had in New York, and helped me meet people. My name then was Laura Pyzel. Do you remember?"

"You're *that* Laura! Of course I remember you and Danny. He was Peter's age and was at our house a lot. Tell me more about my mother. Did you ever see her depressed?"

"Never. She was always 'up,' the most lively one of all, like a butterfly. Her suicide shocked me. Oddly enough, I was wearing a black lace dress she'd given me when I heard the news on the radio."

I'd always wondered if it had been difficult for Mother to adjust to a much less social life with my father in California, and I asked Laura about this.

"Yes, they were so different, and it was hard on her." Laura went on for a while, reminiscing about life in Los Angeles in the forties, and then she said, "You know, Jane, your mother was a very sexy woman with a modern outlook on life."

"What do you mean?" I sat up, alert, in my desk chair.

"Your father was overseas in the navy during the war. Frances was lonely, and while he was away she fell madly in love with a young man named Joe Wade. He was divinely attractive, a real party boy! She was crazy about him. All the women were."

My heart began to race and I had to stop taking notes. "Can you describe him to me?"

"He drank a lot and was very wild," Laura said. "We were scared for her because he was such a loose cannon. We worried what would happen when your father came home."

Suddenly a thought flashed into my mind. "Was he by any chance a musician?"

Laura was silent for a moment, then, "Why, yes, I believe he was."

Oh, my God! There it was. The puzzle was starting to come together.

When I was about seven and Dad was overseas, Mother and I were walking up the driveway of our house in California and out of the blue, she said to me, "Never marry a musician." I remember it vividly—not just because it is such an odd thing to say to a seven-year-old but because I can't remember Mother ever giving me any other advice about life. I would wonder about those words over the years. I vaguely remembered hearing that when Dad was away she had taken a fledgling musician under her wing and was trying to manage his career. I saw so clearly now: She'd fallen in love with Joe Wade and he'd left her.

"Do you know if Joe Wade ever came to our house?" I asked Laura. By now I was shaking and hoping Laura couldn't tell from my voice.

"Yes, he was there often. Like I said, he was wild, like an animal. In fact, he carried a gun and once he shot a hole in the ceiling."

"In her bedroom ceiling?" I asked, trying to imagine what had been going on. Wow! Mother was beginning to take on a Mae West cachet.

"Yes," Laura answered. "Your mother was so worried about that hole in the ceiling." I shouldn't wonder! What could she possibly say to

my father when he came home: "Oh, Hank, it's nothing really. I was just trying out a new pistol and . . ."

I felt a tectonic shifting of plates deep within me, an *owning* of my mother. For the first time I was seeing her not as a victim but as a woman who had claimed her own pleasure. I hung up the phone and began to sob uncontrollably.

The previous fall, another coincidence had made me aware that a Dr. Peggy Miller, a psychologist from Pacific Palisades, California, knew about my mother. Peggy had been the daughter-in-law of Mother's best friend, Eulalia Chapin. Sitting with Peggy in her living room, I felt like an archeologist on a manic dig for clues from the past that could illuminate the present.

"Talk to me about my mother, Peggy. Everything you know."

She, like Laura, spoke of Mother as someone who was always at the center of things, an adventurer.

"Dick, my late husband, even though he was a good deal younger than your mother, told me that he loved being with her because she was the most fun, amusing person he'd ever seen. He told me men were drawn to her like moths to a flame." I asked about Mother's affair with Joe Wade and she confirmed the story, saying that her mother-in-law played the role of Mother's "beard," pretending to be the one Joe was having an affair with and letting them use her home for their liaisons.

Paul Peralta-Ramos, a son of the socialite and artist Millicent Rogers and a cousin of Mother's, said:

The thing about Frances was that she was the person we'd go to if we had a problem. Nothing shocked her. If you knocked up a girl, your mother'd be the one to go to. She was the one who'd find a doctor. She was a rock, a problem solver.

I was stunned. Mother? A rock!

Was I crazy never to have seen my mother as three people had now described her to me: a lively, pleasure-loving, iconic rock of a woman? Why have I remembered her only as a sad, nervous victim to whom I would no more turn for help than try to walk on quicksand, whom I desperately did not want to be like? I discovered the answer a year later

when, with the help of lawyers, I was able to obtain Mother's medical records from the Austen Riggs Center.

I was alone in a hotel room one evening when I opened the thick envelope. When I saw the title, "Medical Records of Frances Ford Seymour Fonda," I couldn't breathe. I flung off my clothes and crawled into bed. As I began reading, my body started shaking, my teeth chattering.

In the midst of the nurses' daily accounts of Mother's deteriorating condition and the medications they were giving her, I found eight single-spaced pages that Mother had typed herself on admission to the institution, with numerous additions and corrections in her hand.

It was beyond belief. I had longed to know her early story. Now I was holding it in my hands. I'm going to share here those parts of it that have helped me understand her—and hence myself. Added to what she wrote herself are things that I have learned from others, including my half-sister, Pan Brokaw.

Mother's father, Ford Seymour, was a thirty-five-year-old lawyer with a large New York firm when, while visiting his hometown, he saw a photograph in the window of a local photography store of nineteen-year-old Sophie Bower. She lived in Morrisburg, on the Canadian side of the St. Lawrence River. He was immediately smitten, which is not surprising given the fetching twinkle in my grandmother's eyes and her slightly open mouth with upturned lips. My grandfather was an exceedingly charming, devilish gentleman from a wealthy, well-connected family. He had, as my half-sister, Pan, says, "a touch of madness, which was appreciated by the ladies." Madness indeed! Based on what Mother told them, the Austen Riggs doctors identified him as a paranoid schizophrenic.

He was determined to marry the young Sophie, and she was too young to have seen the warning signs. After the wedding he moved her to New York City. He would come home after work at the law firm complaining of terrible headaches and have Grandma put cold cloths on his head to soothe him. When her mother came to visit them, she saw right away what was up and said to her daughter, "Darling, the reason his head aches is because he's drunk!" Yes, it turns out Grandpa was a ladies' man, a poetry-writing philanderer with mental health problems,

and an alcoholic. Alcoholism, according to a cousin, ran in his family. His paranoia led him to become pathologically jealous of any attention that his male colleagues paid to his beautiful young wife, and in 1906, shortly after the birth of their first child (my uncle Ford), Grandpa left his New York job and bought a farm just outside of Morrisburg on the St. Lawrence River. Within a year, Grandma found herself right back in Canada whence she'd come, and that is where my mother was born, in April 1908. When Mother was a year old, her mother gave birth to a third child, Jane, but there was something wrong with the little girl from the very beginning. She was later diagnosed as epileptic and needed constant attention.

Life was not easy for the Seymours. Mother described how her father "spanked" the children so often and so hard that Grandma would beg him to stop. Today we call that child abuse. He also kept bars on the doors to keep out anyone who knew Grandma, put towels over the windows, and wired himself into his room. The only outsider allowed to come in was the man who tuned their piano. Mother wrote that when she was eight years old this piano tuner sexually molested her.

I believe this trauma colored her life, and mine—which I will get to in a moment.

Grandpa no longer worked, and the Seymour family received financial help from wealthy relatives, supplementing this by raising chickens and selling eggs and apples. There were no machines to do the washing and no electric irons (although Grandpa expected everything to be ironed all the time); everything had to be made from scratch—including bread, soap, and butter. The only way Grandma could do all the housework and look after her ill daughter Jane was to train the young child to hang on to her skirts at all times. Wherever Grandma went, Jane would be tagging along. How, then, did the other children get the attention they needed? My heart breaks when I imagine my mother, scared of her father's spankings, hiding the dark secret of her sexual abuse by the piano tuner, and seeing this little Jane take whatever attention her mother had left to give. Mother wrote of her anger at her father for having so many children that he could neither support nor educate.

Grandfather's sister, Jane Seymour Benjamin, had a daughter, Mary, who was married to Colonel H. H. Rogers, a professional military man and the son and heir of Henry Huttleston Rogers, vice president of Standard Oil. Over the years, Mary Benjamin Rogers, who was a kind, gener-

Mother in the 1930s.



The photo of nineteen-year-old Grandpa's granddaughter that brought thirty-five-year-old Grandpa a-courting.



Mother in the South of France, 1935.

ous matriarch, must have grown aware that her troubled uncle's family was having a hard time of it up on their farm in Canada. Fifteen years had passed, and by now Grandma had five children to take care of. Mary decided to bring her cousins to Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Before leaving, Grandma put her fifteen-year-old daughter, Jane, into an institution, where she later died of pneumonia.

Mother spent the two final years of high school in Fairhaven and was doted on by her cousin Mary and Mary's daughter Millicent Rogers, six years my mother's senior. Millicent was to become a strikingly beautiful and fashionable socialite, jewelry designer, and humanitarian. The Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos, New Mexico, which houses part of her art collection and the heavy gold and silver jewelry she designed, is testimony to her talent and taste. These relatives of Mother's were interesting, gracious, strong women—the glue that held things together—and they must have been powerful role models. But Mother makes clear in the history she wrote that she was shy and intimidated by them. In her medical records, her doctor wrote, "Always she felt painfully inadequate and inferior socially and intellectually as the poor cousin."

At their home, Mother met Miss Harris, a secretary on Wall Street who earned \$10,000 a year, a startlingly high salary at the time. Maybe this is what gave Mother the idea of becoming a secretary. Mother once told her friend Eulalia Chapin that she "would go to secretarial school, become the fastest typist and best secretary anyone could hire. Then I'd descend on Wall Street and marry a millionaire," she said. And that is exactly what she did.

With some financial assistance from Mary Rogers, Mother attended Katharine Gibbs secretarial school, pulled a few strings with her family's banking connections, and landed a job at the Guaranty Trust Company bank, where she learned the business world firsthand. Then, at twenty, she met multimillionaire George Brokaw, whose family fortune had come from factories that made uniforms for Yankee soldiers during the Civil War. Brokaw had recently been divorced from Clare Booth, author and future wife of Time, Inc.'s Henry Luce. In January 1931, Mother and Mr. Brokaw were married and moved into an elaborate stone mansion with a moat around it on the corner of Seventy-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue in New York City.

Mother, like her mother before her, married a man nearly thirty years her senior who was a serious alcoholic. Brokaw died in a sanitar-

ium a few years later, leaving my mother with a three-year-old daughter (my half-sister, Frances—nicknamed Pan—Brokaw) and a share of his wealth. No longer dependent on the kindness of cousins, she now assumed the role of dispenser of largesse and immediately moved her mother, sister Marjory, and brother Rogers from Fairhaven to New York City to live with her and help look after Pan. This was when my mother met and befriended the beautiful young Arden model Laura Clark.

I closed Mother's medical records and lay in bed feeling indescribably sad for her and at the same time utterly relieved. I wished I could fold her in my arms, rock her, and tell her everything was all right, that I loved her and forgave her because now I understood. Finally, I understood the nature of one of the shadows I inherited from her that has incubated in my body for so long—the shadow of guilt that an abused girl like Mother carries. Why, you may ask, would a child feel guilty for abuse over which she had no control?

For the last decade—not knowing why until now—I have been drawn to studying the effects of sexual abuse on children. What I have learned is that a child, developmentally unable to blame the adult perpetrator, internalizes the trauma as her own fault. Carrying this guilt can make her blame herself for anything that goes wrong and hate her body and feel the need to make it perfect in order to compensate—a feeling that she can pass on to her daughter. (In her history, I was astonished to read of my mother's shame at having had plastic surgery on her nose and breasts.)

A sexually abused child will feel that her sexuality is the only thing about her that has value, and this frequently results in adolescent promiscuity. Several times in the history she wrote, Mother used the words *boys, boys, boys* to describe her school days. Often, victims of sexual abuse seem to carry a strange luminosity because of the sexual energy that was forced into their lives far too early. I have recognized this in women I know who have been abused and subjected to incest and have seen how men are drawn to it . . . proverbial moths to a flame. Learning this has given new poignancy to my father's early description of my mother: "She was as . . . bright as the beam from a follow-spot."

I can now understand that my mother was all the things that people have described—the icon, the flame, the follow-spot—and also all that I

had felt as a child—a victim, a beautiful but damaged butterfly, unable to give me what I needed—to be loved, seen—because she could not give it to herself. As a bright, resilient child, I had sensed, with the animal instinct children have, deep wounds that had been inflicted on her early in her life. I had caught the doomed scent of her fragility, which was probably only intensified by the men she chose. As a child, this scared me, and I moved away from it. Now, as an adult, I can see it as *her* story, not mine, and begin to move into my own—which is the story this book aims to tell.

FATHER

My father's people, the Fondas, were originally from a valley in the Apennines, about twelve miles outside of Genoa, Italy. The valley was deep, and the town cradled in it was named Fonda, which means "bottom." In the fourteenth century, one of my Italian ancestors, the Marquis de Fonda of the Republic of Genoa, attempted to overturn the aristocratic government in order to allow ordinary citizens to elect the doge and the senate. My kind of guy. His efforts failed. He was branded a traitor to his class and fled the country, taking refuge in Amsterdam, Holland. I assume it was during this time that Dutch Calvinism seeped into the Fonda genes. Over the generations, the Fondas became more Dutch than Italian, though there remained, as my brother says, "just enough Italian to put some music into the mix."

The first Fonda to cross the ocean was Jellis Douw, a member of the Dutch Reform Church, who came to the New World in the mid-1600s, fleeing religious persecution. He canoed up the Mohawk River and stopped at an Indian village called Caughnawaga in the middle of Mohawk Indian territory. Within a few generations after my Dutch-Italian ancestors arrived in the Mohawk Valley, there were no more Indians—the town became known as Fonda, New York.

It is still there, not far from Albany. You get to it by riding north along the Hudson River for a while and then west, a train ride I took from Grand Central Terminal for six years—while attending the Emma Willard boarding school in Troy, New York, and then Vassar College in Poughkeepsie.

In the seventies, I visited the town of Fonda with my children and

Dad as Tom Joad.
(Photofest)



my cousin Tina, daughter of Douw Fonda, direct descendant of the original Jellis Douw. We spent most of our time in the town's graveyard, where, on lichen-covered gravestones, some almost toppled over, we could read the old Italian name Fonda, preceded by Dutch names such as Pieter, Ten Eyck, and Douw. But there, among them, was a Henry and a Jayne—our long-dead namesakes.

Mother's ancestors were Tories, loyal to the British. The Fondas were staunch Whigs who actively supported the colonial cause. After the Civil War, Ten Eyck Fonda, my great-grandfather from Fonda, New York, brought the Fondas to Omaha, Nebraska, where my father was raised. Ten Eyck went there as a telegrapher with the railroad, a skill he'd gained in the army. Omaha at that time was a hub of the new railway network.

I never knew my father's parents, who died before I was born. William Brace Fonda, my grandfather, ran a printing plant in Omaha, and my grandmother Herberta, whom I apparently favor, was a housewife who raised three children—my dad and his sisters, Harriet and Jayne. Dad's parents and many of their relatives were Christian Scientists, Readers, and Practitioners. If one can judge from the photos, they were a close, happy, smiling family.

I have often pored over shoeboxes full of family memorabilia looking for clues to my father's dark moods. I am not alone in this quest. Several years ago, when it became clear that Dad's remaining sister, Aunt Harriet, hadn't long to live, I went to visit her at her home outside of Phoenix to ask my questions.

"Was Dad close to his mother? Were there problems in the family?"

"No, absolutely not!" she answered. "And I just don't understand all you girls coming down here to look at the pictures and ask me questions about our family!"

This took me by surprise. "What do you mean, Aunt Harriet? Who else has come?"

Aunt Harriet named various cousins and their daughters. Ah-ha, thought I. Perhaps the Fonda malaise has crept into other corners of the family. Now, it seemed, some of the younger generation were seeking answers, too.

My visit with Aunt Harriet served to remind me how little the people of my father's generation were accustomed to introspection. Her memory



*Tina Fonda, Troy, and me in Fonda, New York, by the graves of our namesakes.
(Montgomery County Department of History & Archives)*



The last Fonda family reunion, in Denver. Dad is fourth from left in the front row next to Shirlee, then Aunt Harriet and her daughter Prudence. Back row, left to right: Peter, Amy, Becky, Bridget, and a cousin, Lisa Walker Duke.

held no nuances, no shades of gray. As far as she was concerned, theirs had been an idyllic life, and perhaps it had been.

I knew that my father had great admiration for his father, William Brace Fonda—like him, a man of few words. There are two stories my father told, and they are revealing.

One evening after dinner, William Brace drove his son down to the printing plant. From a second-story window, he had Dad look down onto the courthouse square below, where a crowd of shouting men brandished burning torches, clubs, and guns. Inside the courthouse, in a temporary jail, a young black man was being held for alleged rape. There had been no trial, not even any charges filed. The mayor and sheriff were there on horseback trying to quiet the mob. Eventually the man was brought out into the square and, in the presence of the mayor and sheriff, hanged from a lamppost. Then the mob riddled his body with bullets.

Fourteen years old, Dad watched all this in shock and terror. His father never said a word—not then, not on the drive home, not ever. Silence. The experience would forever be a part of my father's psyche. It played itself out in his *12 Angry Men*, in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *Clarence Darrow*, and in unspoken words that I heard plainly throughout my life: Racism and injustice are evil and must not be tolerated.

The second story has to do with his father's attitude about acting. Dad had a \$30-a-week job as a clerk at the Retail Credit Company in Omaha, but Marlon Brando's mother, a friend of my grandmother's, got him involved with the Omaha Community Playhouse, where Dad was offered the part of Merton in the play *Merton of the Movies*. When Dad began talking about acting as a career, his father said it was not appropriate for his son to earn his living in "some make-believe world" when there were good steady jobs available like the one he had. Dad argued, and his father refused to speak to him—for six weeks.

Still, the play opened with Dad as Merton. And the whole family, including his father, went to see it. When Dad got home after the show, the family was sitting around the living room. His father had his face buried in a newspaper and still had not spoken to Dad. The mother and sisters began a very complimentary discussion of Dad's performance, but at one point his sister Harriet mentioned something she thought he could have done differently. Suddenly, from across the room his father lowered his newspaper and said to her, "Shut up. He was perfect!"

Dad said that was the best review he ever got, and every time he told the story tears would well in his eyes.

These are among the very few clues I have about my father. I think that the repressed, withholding nature of his early environment colluded with a biological vulnerability to depression to make Dad the brooding, remote, sometimes frightening figure he became. I was stunned to discover in talks with my cousins that undiagnosed depression ran in the Fonda family. Dad's cousin Douw suffered from it, and I suspect Dad's father did as well.

Dad was a study in contradictions. Author John Steinbeck wrote this about him:

My impressions of Hank are of a man reaching but unreachable, gentle but capable of sudden wild and dangerous violence, sharply critical of others but equally self-critical, caged and fighting the bars but timid of the light, viciously opposed to external restraint, imposing an iron slavery on himself. His face is a picture of opposites in conflict.

Dad could spend hours stitching a needlepoint pattern he had designed or doing macramé baskets. He painted beautifully, and there was a softness in many of his acting performances, with nary a trace of the macho ethic. But to me, Dad was not a gentle person. He could be gentle with people he didn't know, utter strangers. Often I run into people who describe finding themselves sitting next to him on transatlantic flights and go on about what an open person he was, how they drank and talked with him "for eight hours nonstop." It makes me angry. I never talked to him for thirty minutes nonstop! But I have learned that it is not unusual for otherwise closed-off men to reveal a softer side of themselves in the company of total strangers, or with animals or their gardens or other hobbies. In the confines of our home, Dad's darker side would emerge. We, his intimates, lived in constant awareness of the minefield we had to tread so as not to trigger his rage. This environment of perpetual tension sent me a message that danger lies in intimacy, that far away is where it is safe.

In his early twenties, and with his father's permission, Dad hitched a ride to Cape Cod with a family friend and soon hooked up with the University Players, a summer stock repertory company in Falmouth, Mass-

achusetts. Among them was Joshua Logan, one of my future godfathers. Dad was the only non-Ivy Leaguer among them.

When Margaret Sullavan, a petite, talented, flirtatious, temperamental, Scarlett O'Hara-style southern belle from Virginia, was invited to join the University Players the following summer in Falmouth, she stole his shy Nebraska heart. Their romance bloomed, until Sullavan went off to star in a Broadway play.

They carried on what was reported to be a fiery, argumentative courtship. After a year and a half, Dad proposed, she accepted, and they married and moved into a flat in Greenwich Village. Less than four months later it was all over: Dad moved into a cockroach-infested hotel on Forty-second Street, and Sullavan took up with the Broadway producer Jed Harris. Dad would stand outside her apartment building at night looking up at her window, knowing Harris was inside with her. "That just destroyed me," he said a lifetime later to Howard Teichmann. "Never in my life have I felt so betrayed, so rejected, so alone."

After the breakup, Dad describes going into a Christian Science Reading Room and finding a man to whom he bared his soul. "I don't know what it was," he said to Teichmann. "I must have had faith that day. I don't even know who the man was, but he helped me to leave my pain in the little reading room. When I went out, I was Henry Fonda again. An unemployed actor but a man." Oh yes, Dad, I want to cry out when I read that, but why didn't you let that experience teach you that talking to someone who listens with an understanding ear can be healing, not a sign of weakness. If faith brought you a sort of miracle on that one day, why didn't you allow yourself to be more open to it and why did you scorn us—Peter and me—each time we turned to these supports—therapy or faith—for help in our own lives?

Dad apparently withdrew into himself after that, working odd jobs here and there. A lot of people, including Dad, didn't have enough to eat. For a while he shared a two-room apartment on the West Side with Josh Logan, Jimmy Stewart, and radio actor Myron McCormick. The four of them lived on rice and applejack. The other tenants in the building were prostitutes, and two doors down the notorious Legs Diamond had his headquarters.

While my mother, the woman who would become his second wife, was living in splendor as Mrs. Brokaw, in a mansion with a moat on Fifth Avenue, Dad was barely hanging on.

In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated president, and within a year Dad got his first big break, doing funny skits in the Broadway review *New Faces* with Imogene Coca. His reviews were terrific and his career started to take off. Around that time, Leland Hayward, who was on the brink of becoming the top talent agent in the country, signed him up and convinced a reluctant Fonda to go to Hollywood for \$1,000 a week. He was on his way.

Two years later, in 1936, my mother, complete with chaperone and her own Buick touring car, sailed to Europe. In London, while visiting a friend on the set of the film *Wings of the Morning*, in which Dad was starring with French actress Annabella, my mother met my father. By now, Dad had become something of a star, with six movies and the lead in a Broadway play under his belt.

"I've always gotten every man I've ever wanted," Mother once told a friend. My father was divinely handsome, appealingly shy, and she wanted him. He admitted that, though too shy to make a move himself, he was easily seduced if a woman set her mind to it. Well, as I learned from Laura Clark, mother was nothing if not seductive.

Soon after their return to New York, Mother and Father were married, and a year later, from that interesting and troubled genetic amalgam: *me voilà*.

They were very different people. His heart was with Roosevelt and the New Deal, hers was with the elite, many of whom were her relatives and who worried about "that man in the White House." His tastes were Spartan; hers, glamorous. He wanted to go to clubs in Greenwich Village and Harlem to hear Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. She wanted to dine with New York's high society. Not that very different people can't laminate successfully, but . . .

It's been easy for me to see Father in myself. I look like him, went into his profession, and have many recognizable characteristics of his—including, unfortunately, a tendency to withdraw and be abrupt (traits I have worked hard to rid myself of). But Dad's genes also gave me his midwestern staunchness, a respect for integrity, an identification with the underdog, and a dislike of bullies. I credit him with my

feelings for the land. Though he grew up in the city of Omaha, you can't live in Nebraska—at least you couldn't back in his time—without an awareness of the land. The Midwest is our farm belt, its economy tied to the rolling grasslands of the Great Plains that seem to stretch to infinity and shimmy in the wind. I believe Dad carried a land-based morality within him till the day he died, and I inherited it—as have my children.

Partly because of my resemblance to him and partly because I wanted to distance myself from my mother, I never bothered to explore what her genes contributed to my makeup. But I have learned that there are traits of hers for which I am very grateful. Her genes provided the leavening in Father's Calvinist mix: the need to reach out to people and nurture them—and also to love a good party. My ability to organize a complex home environment comes from her, as does my generosity.

In an ideal world, people would take classes to learn how to parent. I wish I had. After all, we are required to take lessons before we can drive a car or fly a plane. Does it make sense to embark on the most complex and important task we can undertake in our lives and not be required to demonstrate even a modicum of understanding? I have learned to forgive my parents their shortcomings. I hope my children will forgive me mine.

But forgiving before you've faced why forgiveness is needed is like sewing up a wound and leaving the bullet inside. Forgiveness can't happen until we have gone back to the dark place and experienced the feelings that have been unacknowledged since childhood, named them for what they are, and then separated from them. Taking this journey back in time requires courage. When possible, it helps to have the guidance of a gifted and empathetic professional.

In *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*, psychologist Alice Miller says, "Emotional access to the truth is the indispensable precondition of healing." Only then can we see that it wasn't *about* us. Parents were cruel, perhaps, or neglectful, but it wasn't because *we* weren't lovable. It's because they knew no other way or because they weren't mentally well.

There are, of course, those lucky few who grew up in homes with

parents who loved and respected each other; where raising children was a shared responsibility, not one left solely to the woman; where being a man meant nurturing and cuddling; where the child saw her parents work out their differences in a loving and respectful way; where the parents, when they were there, were really, wholly, fully there.

LADY JAYNE

*In childhood dream-play I was always
the knight or squire, not
the lady:*

*quester, petitioner, win or lose, not
she who was sought.*

—DENISE LEVERTOV,
"Relearning the Alphabet"

LIKE THAT I WAS BORN on the shortest day—winter solstice. It makes me feel connected by some primordial energy to Stonehenge and Machu Picchu, where the solstice was celebrated and revered by the Celts and Incas. I also like that I am able to look back over my span of history to a time before plastic, before smog and sprawling suburbs and fast-food restaurants. Before television, even! I like that I can remember in my bones what it felt like to have a lot fewer people in the world than there are today. Four billion fewer, to be exact. Four billion fewer *feels* different, trust me. Life was very different then, just *because* of the fact of four billion fewer people, seven million fewer just in Greater Los Angeles alone when I was born. It's a feeling of space, more space between people, between houses, between tempers and cars, more open spaces with grass where a girl could explore and hear birdsongs. More birds.

By 1938, the year after I was born, people had picked themselves up and were dusting themselves off from the Depression. The New Deal had put in place the Social Security system, farm subsidies, a minimum wage, and public housing, in an attempt to level the playing field, to pro-

tect ordinary people from those Roosevelt, in his speech accepting the nomination, called "economic royalists." In spite of the rise of Fascism in other parts of the world, in the United States there was a sense of hope in the air.

Hope may still have reigned in my parents' marriage when I was born. Near her due date, my mother took the train to New York and checked in to the swank Doctors Hospital, where the socially prominent came to be sick, have babies, and be treated royally.

My father was filming *Jezebel* with Bette Davis at the time, and his contract stipulated that if his wife went into labor during the shooting, he could fly to New York to be with her. When the time came, Bette Davis was left to play some of their love scenes to the script supervisor. Later, she would feign anger at me about it: "You're the one who robbed me of my leading man, damn you!" she would bark in that clipped, staccato voice of hers.

They named me Lady Jayne Seymour Fonda. "Lady"! That was actually what they *called* me! Later, when I went to school, the cloth name tapes that had to be sewn onto my collar read LADY FONDA. Apparently I was related to Lady Jane Seymour, third wife of Henry VIII, on my mother's side. (But who cares about royalty; the poor woman died shortly after giving birth to the king's long-awaited son.) Not to mention the fact that I didn't want to be anything resembling a lady, nor did I want in any way to stand out. To make things worse, there was that "y" in the Jayne. (That was a Fonda family thing: My father's middle name was Jaynes.)

It appears my father was very excited about my arrival. In his biography, he is quoted as saying, "That was a great day! I took dozens of snapshots with my Leica. Every night the floor nurses had to kick me out." I liked reading that. I've saved those photos. They show me either alone in a crib or being held by a nurse with a white mask over the lower half of her face. Not one shows me in Mother's arms.

Not that my mother wasn't happy about my arrival, but if I am to believe Grandma Seymour, Mother really wanted a boy. In those days women were cautioned against having more than two cesareans and she'd already had my half sister, Pan, so as far as she was concerned, this was her last birth and it better have a penis.

Ah, how deliciously simple it would be to blame *that* for my lifelong feeling of not being good enough.

Two years later, in spite of her doctor's warnings, mother took a final stab at having a son. Grandma Seymour told me that in the event this third child was a girl, a baby boy had been lined up to adopt—that's how much it mattered to her. Mother flew back to New York to the same hospital she'd delivered me in, but when Peter was born, instead of expressing jubilation, Mother moved into the Pierre Hotel for seven weeks instead of coming home with him. What was that about?

To find out, I asked Susan Blumenthal, M.D., M.P.A. Dr. Blumenthal has served as U.S. Assistant Surgeon General and the country's first Deputy Assistant Secretary for Women's Health. A national expert and leading authority on suicide and depression in women, Dr. Blumenthal is also a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University and Tufts University Schools of Medicine. Dr. Blumenthal told me that Mother's behavior suggests that she may have been suffering from postpartum depression (PPD), a mood disorder that can have serious health consequences for mothers and their children. Even today, PPD often goes undiagnosed, and back then it is probable that Mother's doctors were unaware of it as a problem that needed urgent attention. In addition, Dr. Blumenthal said that bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness) often has its initial onset in women after the birth of a baby. After years of suffering, Mother was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the end of her life.

Dr. Blumenthal also underscored that mood disorders (including manic-depressive illness) often run in families. Some research suggests that there may be a genetic vulnerability in certain families for alcoholism in the male relatives and depression in the females. Dr. Blumenthal emphasized that alcoholism can co-occur with bipolar disorder and clinical depression and that there is a higher incidence of alcoholism in people with bipolar disorder as compared to the general population. Therefore, my grandfather's possible undiagnosed mood disorder and alcoholism might have increased Mother's genetic vulnerability for bipolar disorder. Apparently, there can be a link between a father's mood changes and alcoholism and his daughter's depression, both biologically and psychologically.

So at the time of our entry into the world, Peter's and mine, everyone was hidden behind something: Mother was hidden behind depression, Dad behind his camera—capturing the moment but never in the moment—and the nurses behind their masks.

For Peter's birth Dad had graduated from a Leica to a home movie camera, and as soon as he got back home to California he showed Pan and me the movies he'd taken right before Mother moved into the Pierre. I remember exactly where I was sitting in the living room, close to the whirring 16-millimeter projector, when the image appeared of Peter in Mother's arms. This is my first clear memory. The bottom of life dropped out, I was falling down a dark hole. In a letter I found recently from Grandma Seymour, she wrote, "I shall never forget your reaction to seeing Peter in your Mother's arms. The tears streamed down your cheeks, but you didn't cry out loud." I believe it was right then that I sent some soft part of myself down into a vault someplace for safekeeping. I would begin to learn the combination only some sixty years later, at the start of my third act.

I remember the day, almost two months after Peter's birth, when Mother at last came back to our California home. I can see her standing in the doorway of our nursery with Peter in her arms. She was wearing a navy blue skirt and a navy blue short-sleeved pullover sweater with two little nautical flags embroidered on it. I've never been fond of navy blue.

My grandmother told me that she remembered I wouldn't let Mother touch me for a long time after she came home from the hospital with Peter, and if she did, I would cry. "You couldn't forgive your Mother," Grandma wrote me. "You thought that she had rejected you for Peter." I'm sure that her being away for so long after the birth contributed to my feeling of being abandoned, but it was deeper than that. Mother's beautiful aquamarine blue eyes were like mirrors covered with duct tape . . . they could not see me and mirror me back lovingly to myself as a mother's eyes are meant to do. Instead, I became frozen in her sightless gaze. She didn't love me. Real love means seeing the other as she truly is, fully, not just some parts that coincide with what you want to see.

Dad liked me, though. I knew that, especially in the earliest years. I was his firstborn, I had the Fonda look, and I was a tomboy. In the summer, he would take me into his arms, walk down the steps into the swimming pool, and play with me in the water. I would bury my nose in his shoulder on the way down the steps and smell his skin. He always had a delicious musky smell that I loved . . . the smell of Man. Yes, he was happy with me when I was little—and deep down I knew his was the winning team, the one I'd do anything to join.



*Peter's come home and I am definitely skeptical.
That's Pan standing behind Mother.*



I was when I was little



Me right after birth, in the arms of the masked nurse.

My first four years were spent living in a spacious house in California, sandwiched between Beverly Hills and the coastal city of Santa Monica. Margaret O'Brien lived down the street in a big white plantation-style house. Producer Dore Schary, whose two daughters, Jody and Jill, would become schoolmates, lived around the corner. Mother had purchased a home for Grandma Seymour a few doors down from ours.

Today, the house we lived in belongs to actor/director Rob Reiner and his wife, Michelle. In the nineties, with my third husband, Ted Turner, I attended one of their Oscar-viewing parties in a new wing of the house that was the projection room. During a break in the ceremonies, I got Rob Reiner's permission to wander around the house, seeing how much of it I could remember. I walked into the first-floor master bedroom. I knew exactly where I was because the nicest memories I have of being with my mother took place right there at around age four. She would sometimes take me into her bed in the mornings and read me Grimms' Fairy Tales and the Oz stories.

Mother spent a lot of time in bed even then, and she had one of those rolling hospital tables that would swing over the bed, tilt to hold reading material, and flatten to receive a breakfast tray. She always had beautiful lacy bed jackets and peignoirs, and soft, silky sheets. Her bed was a nice place to be, and by then I guess I had forgiven her for preferring my brother. The fairy tales and children's poems she read were illustrated by Maxfield Parrish: colored plates of princesses, sorcerers, fairies, and knights brandishing swords to slay fire-breathing dragons. There was a dreamy, haunting quality about the illustrations, equally romantic and frightening. Even though the illustrated plates appeared only once every chapter, the images were so evocative that they would draw me into their dark, languorous world. Mother's voice would disappear and I would *become* the story, like a movie inside my head.

Why, I wonder, have these stories, filled with sadness, loss, and danger, lasted through the ages? Why did the writers put in things that can frighten children? But if I put myself back then, back into my four-year-old mind, I think that I, like all children, already had an existential understanding that life is dangerous and there is sadness—and rather than lying about these realities, these stories and images externalize them so that we can see and acknowledge them but not die from them.

Starting in the final years of the thirties, right at the end of our block



*This is how Dad looked when he'd take me into the pool.
(John Swope, Courtesy the John Swope Trust)*

lived the Hayward family. What was rather extraordinary about this was that Mrs. Hayward was none other than Margaret Sullavan, my father's first wife—the woman who had broken his heart. Mr. Hayward was Leeland, my father's agent. The Haywards had three children, Brooke, Bridget, and Bill. By now, Sullavan had become a big star of both stage and screen, but her role as mother to her three children took precedence. Leeland's client list included not just my father but every major star in Hollywood: Greta Garbo, Jimmy Stewart, Cary Grant, Judy Garland, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers—and on it went. Inevitably, the Hayward kids were over at our place or we were over at theirs. But during all those years my parents were invited only *once* to the Haywards' for a dinner party, an invitation my mother never reciprocated. I intuited that something in Dad became more alive when Sullavan was around, and if I picked it up, Mother must have.

I have a vivid image of Margaret Sullavan, from the way she looked to the deep, husky quality of her voice. But what impressed me most about her was how athletic and tomboyish she was. Dad had taught her how to walk on her hands during their courtship, and she could still suddenly turn herself upside down—and there she'd be, walking along on her hands. At the Hayward house there were always lots of games and laughter. Mother laughed in those days, too, and had many friends, but she tired easily and was not at all athletic. She would dress me up in frills and pinafores, which I hated, but Mrs. Hayward let her kids wear comfortable clothes and she herself wore old slacks and sandals.

The other major factor in my life after Peter's birth was the impending war. I remember Mother and Father leaving home to go watch the night sky for enemy bombers. This was something patriotic civilians volunteered to do: "keep our skies safe." The governess would get me all dressed for bed and then let me go downstairs to say good-bye as they walked out the door. I was filled with dread. What if they got bombed and didn't come back? The fact that the adults would try to reassure me by explaining that we weren't actually at war yet and certainly weren't being bombed made no difference. If there were no bombs, what were they scanning the sky for? It made about as much sense as the "finish your plate, think of all the starving children in China" routine. If they're hungry, send *them* the food, right? I mean, where's the logic? Adults!

CHAPTER FOUR

TIGERTAIL

*I am much too alone in the world, and not alone
enough to truly consecrate the hour . . .*

I want my own will,

And I want to simply be with my will,

As it goes toward action . . .

*I want to be with those who know secret things
Or else alone.*

—RAINER MARIA RILKE,

"I Am Much Too Alone in This World,

Yet Not Alone"

MOTHER AND DAD decided around 1940 to buy nine acres of land on the end of a dirt road called Tigertail because of the way it wound around the mountain. That part of the Santa Monica Mountain range was all beige undulations like a woman's body, the curves blanketed in native grasses and tattooed with occasional scrub oaks and sturdy California oak trees. On the steeper slopes, red-barked manzanita, chaparral, and sage grew thick, and from the canyon bottoms arose the California sycamores, their thick, gnarled trunks and mottled bark looking like Maxfield Parrish's trees where gremlins live. You won't see this today—those rolling hills are covered with houses now, and the exotic, imported landscaping that surrounds them has all but obliterated the beige California of my girlhood.

My parents built a home there that was as close to a Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse as was possible, given that this was Hollywood and Mother was, well, Mother.

ship—in the house, in her work, with girlfriends, affairs, whatever. Like so many wives, Mother did this, I think, not because Dad specifically asked her to but because that's what disembodied women do in order to be "good" wives. One thing this does *not* do is promote intimacy.

Then came the fateful day, December 7, 1941, the day, as Roosevelt said, "that will live in infamy." The radio broadcast news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Eight months later, Dad joined the navy. He didn't have to go, since at age thirty-seven he was over draft age and had three dependents. But he told Mother, "This is my country and I want to be where it's happening. I don't want to be in a fake war in a studio. . . . I want to be with real sailors, not extras." He was genuinely patriotic and hated Fascism, but I think it was also about him wanting to get away . . . *anchors aweigh!* Mother must have known this, and it must have created a deep sense of abandonment.

Dad graduated at the top of his naval officer candidate school class, selected air combat intelligence duty, and came home for one last week before shipping out to the Pacific. He was wearing an impressive officer's uniform with brass buttons, insignias, and cap. I remember the evening he came to say good-bye. I couldn't remember him ever sitting on my bed to say good night before. Then he sang me a song! When he was done, I sang him one, too. Then he hugged me and was gone.

I'm supposed to be this unemotional, immovable character, but after I kissed Jane and left her room, I stood outside her door, pulled out a handkerchief, and wiped my eyes. Isn't that a crazy thing to react to? I listened to her singing that song and suddenly, I didn't want to leave my family.

I was so happy to read that in his biography. I only wish he could have let himself cry in front of me so we could have shared our tears and I could have seen him vulnerable and human.

During the Tigertail years, the bad news was that I was pretty much left on my own. The good news was that I was pretty much left on my own. I became increasingly independent and found solace in the dry, pungent, natural world of Southern California.

It is conceivable that their marriage was fairly happy, although the abrupt change in lifestyle must have been hard on Mother. She went from being a lively New York City society widow, in charge of her own life, to being, at least at first, the stay-at-home wife of a constantly working movie star who left her alone a lot and wasn't very good company when he was there.

After several years, my father began having affairs. Mother seems to have known nothing of this until one of the women filed a paternity suit against him. Mother used her own money to buy the woman's silence. Pan recalls, "I remember vividly the heavy atmosphere and anguish in Mummy's bedroom . . . her talking with Grandmother."

I am quite sure that this crisis was only the most dramatic of the problems in their marriage. Dad was so emotionally distant, with a coldness Mother was not equipped to breach. Grandma Seymour told several family friends how her daughter would beg him, "Talk to me, Hank, tell me what I've done wrong. Say something, anything." But he would never say a word. "I don't believe he meant to be cruel. Perhaps it was the chronic depression that ran in the Fonda family."

Then there were his rages. They were not the Mediterranean, get-it-all-out-and-over-with variety. They were cold, shut-you-down, hard-to-come-back-from Protestant rages. Except for Peter, who didn't seem to pay attention, we all took great care to avoid his trip wire.

His movie work frequently took him away from home, and even when he was there, he was often studying scripts and preparing his roles. He would sit for hours in our presence and never speak. It was a deafening silence. Mother must have been so lonely, and I think, like me, she blamed herself for his moods. She was outgoing and emotional, and this was surely what had originally drawn Dad to her. But he also saw emotional needs as a weakness. I think he felt that a strong, mature adult was someone who did not need others, except perhaps to satisfy needs like sex or work (although even in his career he seemed to disavow relational needs), or to keep you from feeling lonely. But the needs were what mattered most: The people themselves were more or less fungible.

One of the lessons I internalized from my parents, when I was no taller than the fashionable hems of Mother's Valentina dresses, was that a woman has to answer her husband's emotional and physical needs. She has to twist herself into a pretzel: not let him see who she really is. She should let her more fulsome self express itself *outside* the relation-

I was still called Lady, but now I could wear blue jeans and baggy shirts and I was always full of splinters, burrs, and ticks from roaming the mountains and climbing the oak trees. I would get way up to the top of one particular oak and look out over the Pacific Ocean; triumphant martial music would ring in my head, and I would imagine myself leading an army up the hill to conquer the enemy. Peter wasn't fascinated with Indians the way I was and wasn't quite as adventuresome, so I created a fantasy brother who was Native American. I used to pray: Dear God, please ask Santa Claus to bring me an Indian brother for Christmas.

We were required to take hour-long naps every afternoon when we weren't in school. I hated it, because I was never tired. Lying there for that endless hour, I would create a family out of my fingers. The middle finger, the biggest, was the father, the index finger was the mother, Peter was the pinky, and so forth. I would dress them up in robes made of tissues, and if I'd thought to sneak a pen into bed with me, I'd give them faces. When I was through, I'd wad up the Kleenex into tiny balls, as small as I could make them. Then I would try to smooth the pieces out on the bed so that they'd be just like new, with no wrinkles. While I did this, I'd say to myself, *I can make it better. I can make it all better.* That's when that personal mantra began.

My very best friend was Sue Sally Jones, the best athlete in school. I always felt I could never be as brave and strong, but maybe I could copy how she did things. I remember once asking Peter in all seriousness, "Who do you think could round up buffalo better, Sue Sally or me?"

Without hesitation he said, "You, sis."

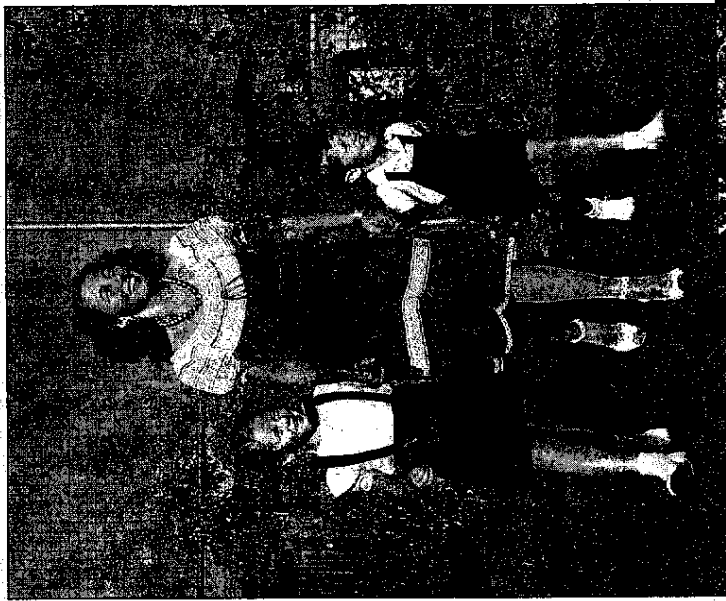
That's my bro! Of course he probably thought that if he said Sue Sally, I'd push him off the roof.

The only time I can remember ever being sat down on an adult's lap and told how to behave was by Sue Sally's mother, Mrs. Jones. I had said the f-word to a boy in the playground. I was spending the night with Sue Sally, and Mrs. Jones took me aside, sat me on her lap, looked straight at me with her pale blue eyes, and said, "Lady, you know the other day on the playground you used a bad word when you were talking with one of the boys? Do you remember?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones." I felt even worse because she wasn't yelling.

"It is not right for you, or anyone, to use dirty words. It makes you seem like you're not a nice girl. But you are a nice girl. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

A photo taken of Mother, Peter, and me to send to Dad during World War II.



Mother, Pan, Dad, Peter, and me (in the tree, in the hat), and our Dalmatian, Buzz, after the war. This was my favorite oak tree to climb. (John Engstead/MPTV.net)



TIGERTAIL

"Yes, Mrs. Jones."

"Will you promise never to do it again, Lady?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones." It is a vivid memory, I think, because of its uniqueness in my life.

In third grade, I decided to take my destiny into my own hands and announced to all that from now on I wanted to be called Jane, with no "y." My third-grade report card says, under the heading "Personality":

Jane is well adjusted, dramatic, has self-confidence and assurance. She is well liked by the children because she is interesting and vital in her responses. Jane has the ability of telling experiences in a very interesting and graphic manner. I think she has dramatic ability and a talent for making the common place have life and interest.

I treasure this evidence that I once possessed self-confidence and self-assurance. They would soon be gone.

As for sex, my first encounter was traumatic. We had two donkeys, Pancho and Pedro, and one afternoon I took them both out, riding Pancho and leading Pedro. I was seven years old, it was a hot day, and I had on shorts. I was on the top of a nearby hill, in an oak forest, when all of a sudden two hooves clamped themselves over my bare thighs from behind and all hell broke loose: Pedro, I later realized, had decided to hump Pancho—with me astride! There was a lot of thrashing about, with bucking and with hooves digging into my legs from behind. Eventually I fell off, onto my back, and found myself staring up at—well, it was about two or three feet long, almost touching the ground, and it was all nasty and scabby.

I knew it was about sex. I don't know how, but I just knew. I looked over at Pancho's underbelly. This was the first time I'd been face-up with Pancho almost on top of me. Pancho was different down there from Pedro. Then it dawned on me: Pancho was really Panchita! A girl! She'd arrived with that boy's name and nobody told me to check it out. See what happens when you don't teach kids the facts of life? I'm not absolutely sure I've ever recovered. Stunned, in pain, and shaking with fear, I picked myself up, saw that I was bleeding where Pedro's hooves had dug into my thighs, and limped back home. I led both of them this time, making sure to glance constantly over my shoulder in case there was any more hanky-panky.



Sue Sally at age ten, just before we moved east. This is how we both looked at that time. Later, Sue Sally played professional polo for twenty years disguised as a man, because women weren't allowed to play. She became the first woman to break that gender barrier. I keep this photo on my desk to remind me of her courage.



At Tigertail: me on Pancho, Peter with Pedro, then Dad, Pan, and Mother.

This was the time in my life when sex first reared its head, an unfortunate but apt pun. One day shortly after the donkey incident, I was playing catch with some friends in the school playground. There was this boy I had a crush on, and I noticed that he kept throwing the ball to this one girl over and over again but never to me. Then I heard him say to her, "I'm trying to sex you up." My heart skipped a beat. I didn't really know what that meant, but I knew that him saying it to her and not to me didn't augur well for me.

When I got home that afternoon I found Mother in her bedroom and asked, "Mom, what does 'sex you up' mean?" I'm not certain it happened this way, but what I remember was that before my eyes, she seemed to go into a sort of slow-motion meltdown. Mouth open, she stammered. But I don't think she actually said anything. Maybe she said, "Later, Lady," or, "Go ask your sister." I know I left her room as uneducated as I went in, and even more curious as to the meaning of those words. Up I went to Pan's room. She didn't seem surprised at all and proceeded to go into scatological detail about who puts what into which hole, followed by, "And then the boy goes pee pee," and so on—followed by a description of how babies come out. What I was seeing in my mind, though, was the image of what had been hanging down underneath Pedro that day on the hill and somehow trying to put that together with my own "down there" and pee pee and . . . well, I was horrified. I had to go sit in my room for a long time and take deep breaths just to settle down from this terrifying but titillating revelation. I don't remember much else about that year of my life, but I remember every single word Pan said that afternoon.

Within days our governess appeared with a book about where babies come from. It had drawings of the fallopian tubes, uterus, and penis. My mother, like so many mothers and fathers still today, was so out of touch with where I was emotionally and developmentally that she thought a mere mention of the word *sex* meant I needed to know all about the plumbing and mechanics. What I really needed was for her to sit me down, put her arm around me, and ask about where I had heard the expression *sex you up*. Then she would have realized that I needed to know about *feelings*, not mechanics; that I was jealous and hurt and thinking that I wasn't good enough to be the one that the boy wanted to "sex up." An understanding hug from her right then would have helped. And then she might have said, "He probably doesn't know what it means, ei-

ther. He probably heard some man say it and thought it sounded grown-up. It doesn't mean he loves that girl and doesn't like you. It's just that this is a time when you begin to have new feelings kind of all stirred up inside when you're around a boy or girl you really like. Have you had feelings like that?" Then I would have felt safe to say, "Yes, I have those feelings around *that* boy and that's why it felt bad when he said that to the other girl," and she and I would have talked about those feelings and how beautiful and how natural they are—a part of growing up.

But though others may have seen Mother as "the one you'd go to if you had a problem," that's not the mother I knew. If it had gone down that way, I would have been able to come to her the following year, when *really* scary things began to happen. But as it was, I never asked her another sensitive question again.

It seemed there'd be a new nanny every few months; none were helpful in the sex-and-feelings department. On the contrary, one of them was very religious. Every morning she would come into my room before I was out of bed and smell my fingers to see if I'd had my hands "down there." She made it clear that pleasuring oneself was a mortal sin.

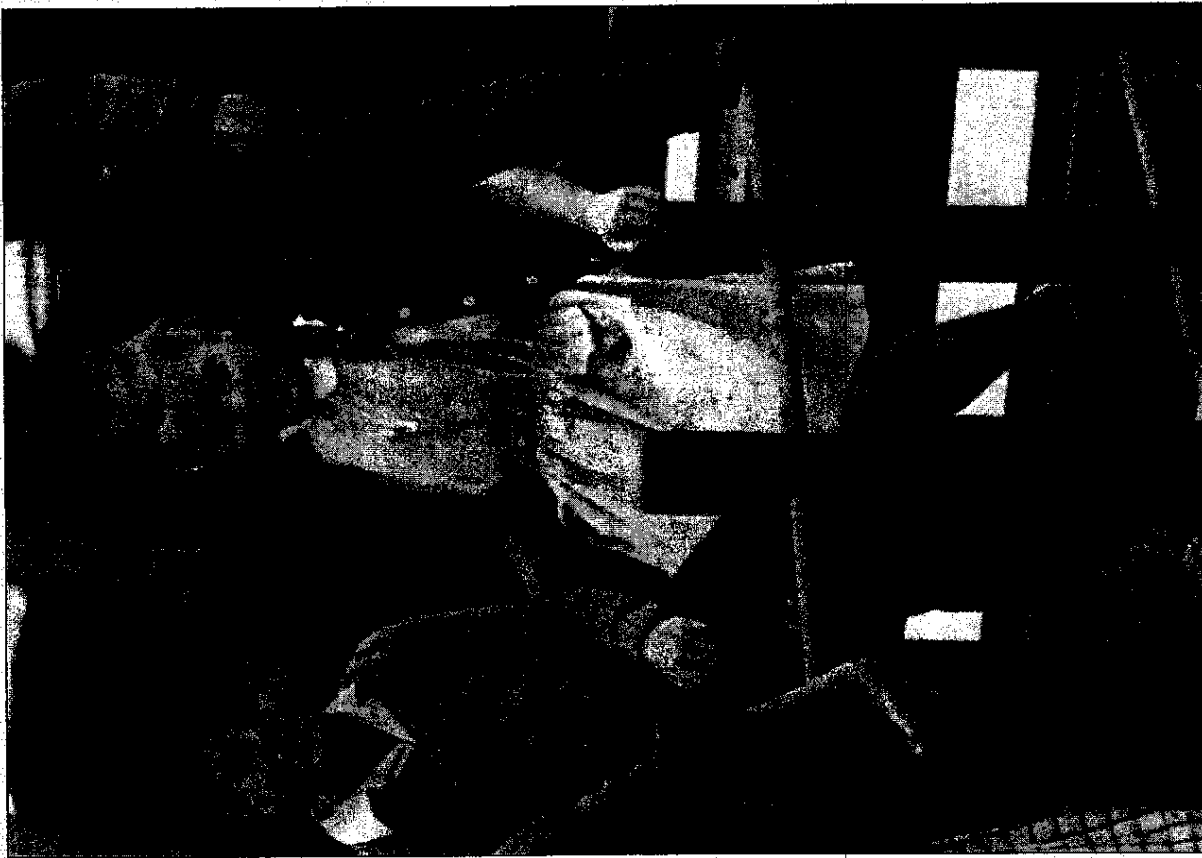
The next nanny was young and pretty and had a boyfriend in the army. One afternoon when he was home on leave, she brought him into the bathroom when I was taking a bath. She asked me to get out of the tub, and when I did, I remember her turning me around. I felt scared. But I have no memory beyond that. I do not know if he molested me, but something bad must have happened around that time, because that was when I began to behave differently and have recurring fantasies in which I either watched or participated in sexually disturbing, even violent, acts. This was also when I began to feel terrible anxiety whenever I saw public displays of sexuality—people necking in movies or smooching on the beach. This anxiety lasted into my fifties, and I do not know why. Could it be that as a child I saw something I shouldn't have? Did something happen with that nanny's boyfriend? I also began getting into trouble at school. I was caught getting a girl to pull down her pants and show me her wee-wee. I was sent to the principal's office for a "good talking-to." This was about the time when I said the f-word, the same period that Mother was having her affair with Joe Wade. I mention these experiences because during much of my life, issues of sexuality

and gender have been a source of trouble and anxiety (as they are for many women and girls). That is why today I help young girls and boys work on these same things.

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Dad was ordered back to the States the same day that Japan surrendered and was subsequently awarded a Bronze Star. Like a lot of men, he came back from the war changed. He had been living a man's life with his war buddies, unencumbered by family responsibilities. I think he liked the sense of mission, the male bonding, being a success at something real instead of just a screen hero.

After he came home, I sensed that Dad was not attracted to Mother anymore. She seemed not to be conscious of it, however, and would walk around naked in front of him. I wanted her to put her clothes on. Didn't she know? She was probably still very beautiful, but—oh, I hate myself for this betrayal of her—I saw her through my father's judgmental eyes. As an adolescent, I would recognize Dad's eyes sizing me up unfavorably. I blamed Mother for the growing distance that I sensed between her and Dad. She wasn't doing the right things to make him love her. And what it said to me was that unless you were perfect and very careful, it was not safe being a woman. *Side with the man if you want to be a survivor.* Go out there and listen to jazz with them and pour them their whiskey and even bring them women, if that's what they want, and learn to find that exciting. Be better than perfect if you want to be loved. And don't walk around naked.

A sad memory from those postwar days was the afternoon I decided to get a book and read next to Dad. Like his father before him, Dad was an avid reader and would sit reading for hours in a big overstuffed chair. My own reading skills had been honed during the years he was away, and I thought reading would be something we could share that didn't require talking. I got the novel *Black Beauty* and sat in a chair opposite him. He hadn't acknowledged my presence, but when I came to a passage that made me want to laugh, instead of stifling the laughter I encouraged it, hoping he'd ask me to share with him what was so funny. But he never looked up or said anything. It was as though I weren't even there. I'd



In fifth grade with my braids.

In 1947 Dad left for New York to begin rehearsals for a Broadway play called *Mister Roberts*, directed by Joshua Logan and produced by Leland Hayward, Brooke's father. Right after that, Brooke came to Tigertail to tell me that her parents were getting divorced. It was the most frightening thing I'd ever heard. If it could happen to that family, where everyone was always laughing and having fun, then . . . No, too frightening to think about.

That was in the beginning of my tenth year. By the time we rounded the circle to the bottom of that year, the end of my first decade, we'd be living in Greenwich, Connecticut—and life as I'd known it would never be the same.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHERE'D I GO?

I was doing research in a an elementary, middle, and high school and sometimes we would thank the students by getting them pizza for lunch. When I would ask the girls what they wanted on their pizzas, the ten-year-olds would say, "Extra cheese with pepperoni," the thirteen-year-olds would say, "I don't know," and the fifteen-year-olds would say, "Whatever."

—CATHERINE STEINER-ADAIR, ED.D.,

*Full of Ourselves: Advancing Girl Power,
Health and Leadership.*

PEOPLE MADE A FUSS over us as we waited backstage in the darkened theater where my father was starring in *Mister Roberts*. We had just landed in New York that night in early June 1948, and Mother, Peter, and I had been driven directly to the Alvin Theater.

Standing next to the stage manager, Peter and I waited for intermission to release our father to us. As I peered around the curtains I saw—was it a stage or a sliver of heaven? It was so close yet far away, bathed in light, awash in an electric energy that crackled back and forth between an unseen audience and Dad in his khaki lieutenant's uniform. But he wasn't "Dad." He was a funny, talkative Mr. Roberts. Even the gunmetal gray of the set, the decks, antiaircraft guns, and turrets of the navy destroyer, seemed to glow from within. No wonder he'd left us to come to this place: Here he was more alive than life, the eye in the center of a hurricane of love and laughter.

Suddenly there was thunderous applause. People began running around backstage, and before I knew it, Dad was next to me giving me a

his kiss and I could feel some of the energy he'd picked up out there com-

ing through his uniform right into me, along with a heady wave of his musk smell. I didn't want to leave, ever. But he and Mother said it was late and that we had to go to bed. So we hugged again and made the thirty-five-minute drive to Greenwich, Connecticut, our new hometown.

Peter was disconsolate at having to leave Tigertail, and rancor fairly oozed from his every pore. While I knew that the days of buckskin and bareback with Sue Sally were over, to me, it felt—at least initially—rather like an adventure. Besides, pragmatist that I am, I always meet necessity with enthusiasm. What was I to do, beg Sue Sally's mother to adopt me? No, my connection to Dad, fragile though it sometimes felt, was still my lifeline, and I wasn't about to put it to a test. I was forever amazed at Peter's willingness to test everybody all the time. How was he so sure the bonds wouldn't fray and break?

I slept late that first morning and the sun was fully up when I jumped out of bed and threw open my window. Below me was an apple orchard that stretched farther than I could see. On either side was what appeared to be a jungle. I realized that the astounding array of greens in my colored-pencil case weren't invented by the pencil company; they were right there below me. I never got dressed so fast, and I was downstairs and out the door. The sound of the door slamming behind me made me do a double take: my first screen door—there were no mosquitoes in California. New too was the heaviness of the air that made my skin wet before I'd even had a chance to sweat—humidity. Whoa, this new place was going to be great!

The grounds seemed enormous, probably because there were no fences to mark the property. Dense hardwood forests and swamps surrounded us on three sides. By the end of the day, I had explored what seemed to be miles of steamy forest. Along the front of the property, separating the orchard from the road, was an old wall made from stacked, lichen-covered rocks without any mortar. Here and there granite boulders poked up through the lush green grasses. I had never seen rocks like these. In my California mountains, the boulders were sandstone—which could be dramatic, like a herd of elephants huddled together—but didn't have shiny grains of mica and veins of quartz and didn't seem to carry the history of the earth itself, the way these Greenwich rocks did. I fell in love with rocks that summer. Even today, the sight of an old Connecticut stone wall makes me happy.

A whole new environment suddenly became mine that first Greenwich summer and was like a salve on the wounds of the various illnesses and broken bones that began to manifest themselves as the tensions between my father and mother became more and more palpable. That was also when I started to bite my fingernails down to the bleeding quick. Mother made me sleep wearing white cotton gloves. She put bitter-tasting stuff on the ends of my fingers. She got neighbors to talk to me about how, like hairballs in cats, the chewed nails would create a ball in my stomach and make me sick. But nothing could get me to stop the nail biting, since nothing spoke to the *reasons* I was doing it. Same reasons I was getting sick so much.

One day, while walking down one of the narrow country roads that had no sidewalks, I encountered a tall, skinny, freckled-faced girl with short dark hair. Diana Dunn. It didn't take long to discover that we shared a passion for horses and would both be in the same class that fall at the all-girls Greenwich Academy.

She introduced me to the Round Hill Stables and Riding Club. I learned to take a horse over a jump there, and it was there that Teddy, the stable boy, broke my arm in a wrestling match. Another boy would find his way over to our house to play with me that summer. I don't remember his name, but he was the son of the gardener on a nearby estate. He, Teddy, Diana, and I would roam for miles like a pack of wild dogs, noses to the ground, sniffing, snooping, rolling about, wrestling. They knew I was a girl because my name was Jane, but aside from that, it was hard to tell me from the boys. I don't think that Mother was terribly pleased that my friends were the sons of gardeners and stable hands, but she was slowly sinking into a state of painful desperation and I was left to choose the company I kept.

Diana had her own horse, a black-and-white paint named Pie. Her mother, a tall, slim woman, very much a part of the "horsey" set, was kind to me during the almost four years we lived in Greenwich. Someone, perhaps Mother, must have asked the Dunns if I could stay with them during some of her protracted absences, because I spent an inordinate amount of time there. In the fall of that first Greenwich year Dad told Mother he wanted a divorce, and then she began to disappear to what I now know was the Austen Riggs Center. That's when Grandma came from California to take care of us and run the house.

The Dunns filled the void that had opened when we left Sue Sally Jones

and her mother behind in California. While Sue Sally had represented cowboys, Indians, and buckskin, Diana was about fox-hunting, canary yellow jodhpurs, patent-leather-topped boots, and hard velvet caps.

A good thing about starting a new school is that it's a chance to try on a new personality. One day I did something in study hall that made the class laugh. I don't remember what it was, but I remember how good it made me feel to be found funny. Being a clown and a cutup gave me an identity.

My first fall was a revelation to see the leaves turn vivid orange and red. It was also when I started fox-hunting at the urging of Diana Dunn. I don't remember a time when I wasn't scared while hunting. I was scared when we'd come to a jump, and I was terrified every time we'd gallop around a sharp corner when the ground was wet, for fear the horse would slip and fall on me. I was used to being scared, but I always felt that courage is the manifestation of character, so I pretended not to be. No one ever knew, especially Diana. Being scared was absolutely the worst thing a girl could be. Being scared meant you were a sissy.

Then winter came. I'd seen snow before but had never *lived* with it, where you have to shovel it to get to the car to go to school, where you can go sledding in your backyard. I was furious that Peter could whip out his little penis and write his name in the snow, so I tried to do the same by taking off my panties and running as fast as I could with my legs wide apart, trying to spell "Jane" as I peed. Needless to say, it was indecipherable—and I got very cold.

That first Christmas in Greenwich, Dad gave me a Mohawk Indian costume made out of buckskin, complete with beaded moccasins and a strip of fake hair that stood up straight when I pinned it on my head, a real Mohawk hairdo. At that point, I was only six months out of California, still had my long blond braids, and the Lone Ranger was still my role model, so this was about the most perfect thing Dad could have given me. That very afternoon I put on the outfit and Dad made a home movie of me. Out of the thick underbrush I ran on silent, agile feet to the top of a knoll, where I stopped and, just like an Indian scout, put my hand above my eyes and scanned the horizon for the enemy. Dad even shot a close-up of my serious little face, looking slowly from right to left before slipping silently back into the forest—my film acting debut. When I look at the footage now, I remember it was about that time that I started to

hate the way I looked, especially my round, chubby face. I thought I looked like a chipmunk with nuts stored in my cheeks.

Performing for Dad that Christmas afternoon would mark the end of my cowboy and Indian fantasy life. I never dressed up as a Mohawk again. I was entering the period when social acceptance becomes more important to an adolescent girl than almost anything else. Shortly after that is when I had my beautiful braids cut off. Nobody else at school wore braids and they made me feel nerdy. I don't remember who cut them. Mother or a professional, but whoever did it wasn't doing me any favors. The way it was cut, my hair hung to just below my ears as straight and stubborn as a mule's tail, no style, no shape, and my cowlick made my bangs stand up as if they'd been electrocuted. Hair matters just about more than anything when you're that age, right? Girls with good hair were always more popular. I was in every sense just "plain Jane," the cutup—with bad hair.

Sometimes in the evenings I would walk down the road, peer inside houses, and watch a family at the dinner table. I was fascinated by the differences between our home and other people's. Later, when I made friends and was invited to their homes, I would sit at the dinner table feeling like a Martian as I watched parents, guests, and kids interact. The experience of being asked what I thought about a particular subject was new to me. This didn't happen in our house. Witnessing adults having multilayered exchanges, full of lively opinions and disagreements, allowed me to understand that beyond the sliver of reality that was my ten-year-old life there lay a vast world of ideas that I would one day grow into.

I lived in Greenwich through two elections—when Truman beat Dewey and when Eisenhower beat Adlai Stevenson. I remember lively discussions about the elections during dinners at my (Republican) friends' homes. Even though my father was a "yellow dog Democrat" (he'd sooner vote for a yellow dog than for a Republican) and cared passionately about his politics, he rarely engaged us children in political discussion. It was around this time that a rupture occurred in Dad's friendships with his old pals John Ford and John Wayne and his best friend, Jimmy Stewart (though this last would be patched up over time).

The rupture centered around Senator Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). "McCarthyism" became synonymous with baseless mudslinging and the manipulation of the American public through fear. Every organization associated with Roosevelt

and the New Deal was labeled subversive. Thousands of innocent people who had done nothing more than join liberal organizations were criminalized. McCarthy and HUAC, which included a young congressman from California, Richard Nixon, interpreted any dissent whatsoever as subversive. Dad saw this as a "red-baiting witch hunt," and he once kicked in a television set while the HUAC hearings were being broadcast. Looking back on those times, I find it interesting that Dad never joined Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, John Huston, Lucille Ball, John Garfield, and Danny Kaye, who flew to Washington where the HUAC hearings were taking place and held a press conference in support of the Hollywood Ten, as they were called: producers and directors accused of being Communists. Some in Hollywood, like Ronald Reagan (then president of the Screen Actors Guild, who had been an FBI informant since 1946), Gary Cooper, George Murphy, Walt Disney, and Robert Taylor, cooperated with the committee and agreed to name those they believed were Communists. These "friendly" witnesses were given prepared statements and as much time as they wanted to speak, whereas "unfriendly" witnesses were cut off and their lawyers were never allowed to cross-examine. Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne, though they didn't testify, were staunch McCarthy supporters. I didn't understand what it all meant at the time, except that the careers of many people who worked in Hollywood were being destroyed because the big studios agreed to break their contracts with the Hollywood Ten and never hire them again unless they swore an oath that they weren't Communists. Charlie Chaplin, for instance, was labeled subversive and was not allowed to reenter the United States until 1972, when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presented him with an honorary award. I was there at the Oscars, onstage with him, that year. Little did I know that almost twenty years later I would be called before the later version of HUAC, or that at age fifty-four I would marry a man who had been brought up by his father to believe that Roosevelt and the New Deal were Communistic.

In the fall of 1948, as if it had been ordained, we were once again reunited with Brooke, Bridget, and Bill Hayward. It was amazing to all of us Fonda-Hayward children that once again our families, though slightly reconfigured, found ourselves together on the opposite side of the country from California—with all of us going to the same schools, Bill to Brunswick with Peter, Brooke and Bridget to the Greenwich Academy with me.



Riding in Greenwich meant jodhpurs, boots, and a velvet cap.



Commence return visit to the Ashby Road with our horsebacker, Dan, in Brunswick.

It helped having another Hollywood family there, because soon I realized that people were gossiping about the Fondas. In Hollywood, no one had paid much attention to the fact that Dad was a movie star and delaminating families caused little stir, but in Greenwich it shook things up. It was thought, probably correctly, that divorce and scandal were more common among entertainment folk, and perhaps there was fear that it would become contagious.

I also first heard the word *nigger* in Greenwich. One day, while riding in the backseat of the car, which Dad was driving, I said the n-word. Dad stopped the car, turned around, and smacked me (lightly) across my face, saying, "Don't you ever, ever use that word again!" You better believe I never did. It was the only time Dad ever hit me.

I have often wondered about my interest in people regardless of fame, fortune, or race. I can't help but feel that the answer lies in my father's films. Dad himself was never verbal about race or class, yet the characters he played were the kinds of men he admired: Abraham Lincoln, Tom Joad (the Okie union organizer in *The Grapes of Wrath*), Dad's character in *The Ox-Bow Incident* (who deplores the lynching of a Mexican), Clarence Darrow, Mr. Roberts. I once asked Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter, Yolanda, if her father had talked to her much when she was little about life and values and spirituality.

"No," she said. "He never did that."

"Neither did my father," I said, "but they taught us through their films and sermons, didn't they?"

Part of the school gossip was that my father was dating a "tomato." I asked a friend what a tomato was and was told it meant a luscious, ripe young thing. The thought made me feel sort of nauseated. But like my mother, I didn't allow myself to get angry at Dad.

In seventh and eighth grades, I began my love affair with Broadway show tunes. Brooke and I learned every word to every song in the Broadway hits *South Pacific* and *The King and I*. Little did I know that the "tomato" Dad was dating was the twenty-one-year-old stepdaughter of Oscar Hammerstein—the man who wrote all the words to the show tunes I loved to sing.

As we rounded the circle to the bottom of my eleventh year, sexual feelings and being twitter-pated around certain boys had become a major facet of my life. If I felt a boy was cute, he'd be the one I'd beat up. I al-

ready mentioned Teddy, the stable boy who broke my arm. What I didn't say, though, was that he was blond and very cute and I had kicked him in the balls several weeks prior to our wrestling match, causing him to collapse and turn white. Seemed to me like a perfectly reasonable way to flirt.

I used to think I really wanted to be a boy because that's where the action was, and for a while I looked so androgynous that I'd be asked whether I was a boy or a girl. That was the biggest compliment I could get. Looking back, I think I just wanted to be exempt from what was required of girliness. I could do tomboy, but I didn't know how to do girl—except in my active fantasy life.

I remember getting sick at school once and being sent to the infirmary, where I was told to lie down till someone could come get me. As I was lying there, I looked up and saw, on a bookshelf above me, a pamphlet titled *Masturbation*. I couldn't have been all that sick, because I wasted no time getting it down and reading as much of it as I could before the school nurse came back. It said that masturbation gave you acne and made you go insane. I bet it was planted there just for girls like me. Needless to say, it shook me up, much more so than the governess who would smell my fingers. Today I believe it should be criminal for adults to try to make children feel guilty for things that are natural and perfectly healthy. It's probably because so many of them were tormented themselves by their parents and teachers when they were children, so they're taking it out on the next generation!

I was in seventh grade when we moved out of that house and into the spooky house on the hill overlooking the Merritt Parkway—where I built my little cardboard house-within-a-house and Mother began to collect butterflies.

My roaming soon ended. The Lone Ranger had become obsolete as a role model. I watched some of my friends becoming flirtatious and felt they were in on something I just didn't get. I was so earnest (like my father) that I thought if I flirted, it meant I had to be ready to follow through, go all the way. "Going all the way" seemed less sinful than being accused of "cock teasing." If you started, you were supposed to finish, sort of like cleaning your plate.

In June 1950, two months after Mother's death, I was sent to a camp in New Hampshire with Brooke and another friend, Susan Turbell. It was a

complex summer for me. Outwardly I showed no effects of Mother's death, but Brooke said I would wake up in the middle of the night screaming about my mother: "I mean screaming so that the entire staff had to appear to calm her down," she wrote in her memoirs.

I got sick with a flu that was going around camp. But in addition I developed some sort of "down there" issue and it wasn't menstruation. I spent a lot of time in the infirmary for whatever diagnosable sickness I had, but I was too scared or embarrassed to ask the nurses to see what was wrong with me. It hurt, it itched, it was scary, and I told no one. I began to think that my *down there* was made wrong, that when God was passing them out, I got a defective one. It was a fear that stayed with me for years. That's one of the problems with not having a mother to talk to.

Mother had killed herself ten months before a new house she'd been building for us was finished. It was April and I guess she couldn't wait. It didn't help that April was also the month of her birthday. Dr. Susan Blumenthal reminded me of this line from a poem by T. S. Eliot, "April is the cruelest month." She said that of all the months of the year, April has the highest suicide rate, followed by October. "Spring is coming, seasons are changing, it should be a time of hope, coming out of winter, but it's also a time of changes."

Dr. Blumenthal explained that the peaks in suicide rates during the spring and fall may be linked to seasonal changes, disruptions in the sleep/wake cycle, and/or alterations in circadian rhythms—the body's biological clock—that can affect mood and behavior. She said, "Some researchers hypothesize that these seasonal changes with accompanying alterations in sleep and/or circadian rhythms and brain neurotransmitters may trigger the cycling phenomenon from depression to mania and mania to depression in certain people with bipolar disorder. Following the long winter of depression, a person's mood may seem to be improving, but in fact the individual is becoming agitated and is acquiring more energy during this cycling phase to plan and carry out a suicidal act. Additionally, there is usually some precipitating, humiliating event or loss that occurs (in the absence of protective factors) that triggers the event."

But I didn't know yet that Mother had killed herself. I learned it that fall in study hall, when a classmate passed me a movie magazine with a story about my father. I started reading it and came to this sentence: "His

wife, Frances Fonda, cut her throat with a razor while in the sanitarium." I knew instantly this was the truth, that they had lied to me about the heart attack.

Following study hall was art class. We were all painting things onto black tin trays—mine were white dogwood blossoms and two yellow butterflies. Brooke was sitting next to me and I made her lean under the table, where I whispered, "Brooke, did my mother commit suicide?"

"Well, I . . . gosh, Jane . . . I don't know. I . . ." she stammered, managing to avoid an answer. Later, in her memoirs, *Haywire*, she wrote that when my mother died:

the entire student body at the Greenwich Academy was warned at the assembly by Miss Campbell that it was to respect that story [that Frances Fonda had died of heart failure] for an indefinite period of time.

As soon as school got out that day, I ran all the way home and right up to Mrs. Wallace's room. Mrs. Wallace was a governess who'd been hired to help Grandma with us after Mother's death. She was an attractive, kind lady with gray hair pulled back into a soft bun.

"Mrs. Wallace," I asked breathlessly, "did my mother commit suicide?" If Mrs. Wallace was surprised by my question, she didn't show it. Instead she took me onto her lap and said gently, "Yes, Jane, she did. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you."

"But is it true that she cut her throat with a razor?"

Mrs. Wallace hesitated for a second. Right then and there she must have made the decision to tell me as much of the truth as a twelve-year-old could handle.

"Yes, she did. For a few months she'd managed to convince her doctors in the sanitarium that she was doing better. They wrote your father and grandmother that she didn't seem 'to be behind the eight ball anymore.' That's how they put it . . . 'not behind the eight ball.' They were hopeful that she'd be coming home for good soon and so they relaxed their guard and that's how she did it. She wrote notes to each of you before she died."

"Does Peter know?"

"No, he doesn't, and I really think it would be best if we didn't tell him just now. He's so fragile."

"Do you think I could see the note she wrote me?"

"Your grandma told me that she doesn't have the notes anymore. I'm sorry."

That would give me plenty to think about.

I wasn't angry, but I would have liked to have read her note to me. Was she mad that I hadn't seen her on her last visit home? Maybe if I had seen her, I could have said something really nice to her and she would have changed her mind. Maybe she knew I didn't love her and that's why she did it. But did I love her or didn't I? I couldn't answer that, because some part of my heart had been tumbled into numbness.

A few months later, in December 1950, Dad married the girl he'd fallen in love with—the tomato—Susan Blanchard, Oscar Hammerstein's step-daughter. They flew to the Virgin Islands for the honeymoon.

One evening I was over at Diana Dunn's house when the phone rang. Mrs. Dunn answered it and her face sort of collapsed as she listened and the "Oh" that came out of her was about two octaves lower, the way voices get when there's bad news. She glanced quickly at me, then dropped her eyes and covered the mouthpiece.

"Jane, your brother has had an accident. He's shot himself and is in a hospital in Ossining. Your grandmother wants me to bring you there right away."

Peter's shot himself.

I went outside myself again.

The hospital was near Sing Sing prison. When I got there Grandma explained that Peter had been declared dead on arrival but at that very moment, miraculously, the prison doctor, who was a leading surgeon for puncture and bullet wounds, had walked into the hospital from a hunting trip. He discovered Peter's heart was still beating, though faintly, and he had worked fast to stop the bleeding. The bullet had gone into Peter's belly, hit his rib cage, pierced his stomach and kidney, and lodged just under the skin next to his spine. I sat with Grandma in the waiting room. After a while, the doctor came out of the operating room and called Grandma into the hallway. I heard him tell her that in spite of his efforts, Peter's heart had stopped beating, and while they'd managed to start it up again, he didn't know if Peter was going to make it. That was the first time I remember seriously praying. I said, "Dear God, if you let him live, I'll never be mean to him again. Amen."

Dad cut short his honeymoon, managed to get a plane from the islands (no mean feat back then), and arrived within hours at the hospital, where the three of us kept vigil into the night. Then we went home to get some sleep and came back again the next day. We did that every day for five days. I was allowed into Peter's room once to see him lying there, so small that he was barely a bump under the sheets, with all the tubes going in and out of him. On the fifth day, the doctors announced that Peter appeared to be coming out of the crisis zone. Several days later his condition was said to be stable. He was going to make it.

I returned to school in a zone of somnambulance. My routines were done, my homework turned in. But my body always felt tense, my breathing shallow. Nothing seemed to have a reason. "Isn't she something?" the teachers said. "The worse things are, the stronger she gets." The kudos I received for appearing strong satisfied a need for approval and locked me into a *modus vivendi*: Jane, the strong one. The shell that formed around my heart served a purpose by keeping me on my feet, but it solidified both my superficiality and my independence.

Peter stayed in the hospital for a month. He became a brat almost immediately and I began to backpedal on my promise to God.

The shooting accident had happened when Peter was visiting friends, one of whom persuaded the family chauffeur to drive them to a skeel range near Sing Sing to practice shooting an antique .22-caliber pistol. While Peter was reloading, the pistol discharged into his stomach. Fortunately, the chauffeur knew where the hospital was and acted fast to get him there. Given the timing, however, I can't help but wonder if unconscious forces weren't at work in a boy who was very hurt and angry that his father had remarried and that everyone seemed to have so quickly forgotten his mother.

It had been a rough couple of years, starting with Mother's illness and death. The following year, my classmates started having parties at their homes when their parents were away, where games like post office and spin-the-bottle were de rigueur. I wanted to be popular and fit in, but while Brooke and other girls seemed to have things under control, I dreaded these games. I don't remember if I was more scared that some-

one would "get" me and try "to go too far" or that no one would want to. As other girls became more and more "feminine," I seemed more and more out in limbo, a lump of androgyny, always behind, scrambling to catch up. What happened to the girl who was described in her third-grade report card as adjusted, self-confident, and assured—the girl who saw herself as heroic? She had slipped away so quietly that I never even said, "Good-bye, see you again in fifty years."

CHAPTER SIX

SUSAN

*Ah, as we prayed for human help: angels soundlessly,
with single strides, climbed over*

our prostrate hearts

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

ONE AFTERNOON, Grandma took me to a New York hospital to visit Dad, who was recovering from knee surgery. I walked into his room, and sitting next to his bedside was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. She seemed to be in her early twenties and had light brown hair pulled back tightly into a large chignon that accentuated her pale blue, slanted eyes, not unlike Mother's. She wore a rather old-fashioned high-necked white blouse trimmed with lace. Around her wrist was a watch on a black velvet band. Dad introduced us.

"Jane, this is Susan."

She was only nine years older than me. Still, I so desperately needed a woman to show me how to be that it must have been the angels who climbed over our prostrate hearts to bring Susan to us. If she was a "tomato," it was definitely the sweet, sun-ripened kind.

In the summer of 1951, a little over a year after Mother's death, was when I got to know her. I was going on fourteen. Dad was finishing the national road tour of *Mister Roberts* and would be performing in Los Angeles all summer, so he had arranged for Peter and me to spend the vacation with them there.

We were ensconced in a magnificent mansion built years earlier by William Randolph Hearst for his paramour, actress Marion Davies. It had been converted into a hotel with marble columns, mosaic tile floors,

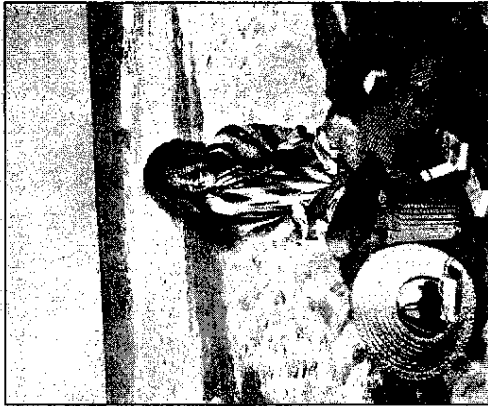
gold-leafed mirrors, an Olympic-size tile swimming pool, and a beach club. We spent that entire summer at the beach, partly because it was a fun place to hang out and partly because Susan, a New Yorker, didn't know how to drive. Other wives might have demanded that Dad get a chauffeur in order to spend a lot of time in Beverly Hills engaging in "cash therapy." Not Susan. She hung in there with us. I don't understand it, given what might be my own callowness at her age, but somehow her twenty-two-year-old soul had the generosity and know-how to wrap itself around Peter and me and be a mother. Peter liked to call her Mom Two.

One perfect California evening, when the sun was setting red and the breeze was velvet and smelled of salt and kelp, she and I were sitting on the marble steps leading down to the pool when she asked me how I was feeling about Mother's death.

I stopped breathing. In all that time—more than a year—no one had raised the subject of Mother with me, much less asked how I *felt*. It was a germinal moment. The problem was that I had no words to offer her. I was so unused to expressing my feelings that I'd become emotionally illiterate. I did tell her that I hadn't been able to cry at the time and that I had learned it was a suicide from a movie magazine. She was quiet for what seemed a long time. I don't think she knew what to say. I certainly wouldn't have at her age, but I remember her suggesting that perhaps Mother's death had been a blessing in disguise. It seems strange to me now that I could have found those glib and potentially insensitive words comforting, but my thinking about Mother was so utterly confused that "blessing in disguise" provided me with a handle, a way to explain the event to myself. Maybe Susan knew I needed a handle.

She was lithe, with tiny, well-turned ankles and long, El Greco knees. She'd studied dancing with the fabled Katherine Dunham, and dancing was important to her. She was superb, often twirling or cha-cha-ing around rooms with pretend partners, her waist-length hair flying, while singing Broadway show tunes. Sometimes she'd doo-wop to a jazz record, fingers snapping, head shaking, eyes closed, while she'd dance a cool little jitterbug in place. I would go to my room afterward and try to imitate what I'd seen her do. I imitated her a lot. If I could be like her, maybe Dad would love me more.

Laughter, which had been an unfamiliar sound in our family for a long time, was a gift from Susan to us. She had a repertoire of jokes,



Susan on the beach at Ocean House.

some long, elaborate ones that would crack her up when she finally got to the punch line; some Jewish jokes that required my learning Yiddish words; some from the dark, smoky world of jazz musicians, a world with which she was familiar. Susan was a wonderful combination of goofy and sophisticated, with a little pioneer thrown in for ballast. Her *joie de vivre* washed over us that summer.

Mother's younger sister and her alcoholic husband had joined Grandma as our caretakers in Greenwich and were reportedly trying to get legal custody of us. Susan told Dad that it was unconscionable for us to be adopted by relatives and that he absolutely had to take us to live with them in New York. I guess he was thinking of leaving us in Greenwich and just visiting from time to time. If the wife who followed Mother had been someone other than Susan—say, like wife number four, the Italian one—I honestly don't know what would have become of us. I would have survived, maybe, but not as a productive citizen. During her brief five years with my father, Susan taught me by example how to be a step-mother. Little did I know how well that would serve me later when, between one husband or another, I would have six stepchildren of my own.

I was too smitten and immature to notice (though I probably saw but quickly forgot what I'd seen) that Susan wasn't quite the same when Dad was around. Of course, nobody was the same when Dad was around, except Peter. Her ebullience would dim a little. If she got too rambunctious, Dad would rein her in, perhaps embarrassed that her spontaneity and exuberance accentuated their age difference—twenty-three years. She once said it was as though Yente the matchmaker from *Fiddler on the Roof* lived with Ibsen's uncompromising Minister Brand. When she was interviewed by Howard Teichmann, she said, "I was your typical Japanese wife. I wanted to do everything to please him." Again, I was seeing woman-as-pleaser as the way to "do" relationship. Unbeknownst to me as well was that she was bulimic, which I would soon become.

These things don't take away from the fact that Susan wanted to be in a real relationship with me and I was ready to meet her there. She found in me not damaged adolescent goods but a responsive partner. As I look back, I see that my girlhood retreat into the Lone Ranger persona was my way of holding out for a real relationship: If it wasn't real, I'd just as soon be by myself, thank you. But like a heat-seeking infrared laser beam, I could scan the horizon and pick up the presence of anyone

warm and real I could learn from and go there. But by late puberty (by which time Susan and Dad had divorced), I'd turned off the laser beam and settled for whatever relationships were out there, real or not. Being alone didn't feel like a postpuberty option!

In California that first summer, Dad and Susan would often take Peter and me with them when they went out to dinner in swank Hollywood restaurants like the Brown Derby and Chasen's, one of Dad's favorites. We had never been with him in these kinds of social situations before, so while I knew in an abstract sort of way that he was famous, I didn't know how fame manifested itself in his life. I was struck by how, when he entered a restaurant, there would be a shift in energy, as though he were a magnet. Restaurant owners like Mr. Chasen would call him by name, and as we'd be ushered to Dad's "special" table or, in the case of Chasen's, the red leather booth, heads would turn and I'd hear, "Why, that's . . . ?" being whispered at other tables. Having waiters know your name and what to bring you to drink without your even having to say anything became a sign of celebrity for me. Sometimes his agent from MCA (the Music Corporation of America) or Lew Wasserman and Jules Stein, who ran MCA, and their wives would join us.

Being invited to share Dad's grown-up world was a chance for me to see how it all worked. I noted with interest how Dad behaved differently in a social setting, how he was warmer and funnier with people who were not intimates, especially after a couple of Jack Daniel's. But it was Susan I watched most closely, logging in the details of her social moves, how she became very prim with certain older (important) people and riotous with chums like Johnny Swope and Dorothy McGuire from Dad's early days. Once, driving back to Ocean House, she reached into her dress and pulled out a false from her bra, laughing loudly at herself. I wondered if I could ever be that open in front of others. If there was something not perfect about myself, like the size of my breasts or bottom, I always tried to hide it as best I could and hoped no one would notice. I had a tiny waist, about nineteen inches around, and a full, high bottom that seemed to me way too big in proportion to my waist. Worse, I had overheard Dad say that my legs were too heavy. When I heard him say that, I went to bed and slept for two days, the only way I knew to escape those words that haunted me for the rest of my life.

This was a summer when I was closer to Peter than usual, literally and figuratively. Because our bedrooms adjoined and we shared a bath-

room, we had ample opportunity to nurse each other's sunburns and hang together. We'd left our Greenwich friends behind, and all we had was each other as we accommodated ourselves to what was clearly a new chapter of our lives. On weekends at the hotel there would be dances for adults in the grand ballroom on the ground floor, complete with live orchestra. Under Susan's spell, I had decided dancing was something to be cultivated, so Peter and I would sneak downstairs and waltz madly together in an empty room next to the party. Sometimes we'd slow-dance real close. It was nice to have a brother to practice on safely. That summer I learned how much I cared for my brother, and I also saw more clearly how very different we were.

We have different rhythms, different life views, and different ways of handling situations. A lot of this has to do with Mother's preferring him, or at least trying to make him hers, while I was more my father's child. Recently Susan described for me how the differences manifested: "You were watchful, taking everything in. Peter was frenetic, acting out." Though it wasn't intentional, Dad was often cruel to Peter. I use the word *cruel* because, though not deliberate, the effects were the same as cruelty. He often tried to be a good father, doing things he must have done with his father: fishing, flying kites, building model airplanes—the male bonding rituals. But if a parent doesn't like herself or himself very much, it is the child of the same sex as that parent who has the hardest time. Multiply the impact severalfold if the parent is a celebrity. It's not just your father who is making you feel like a sissy; it's an icon, adored by millions as someone of integrity. I don't think Dad liked himself very much, and perhaps he saw reflected in Peter the sensitivity and emotionalism that he had somehow buried. As Susan once said, "There's a scream in your dad that's never been screamed and a laugh that's never been laughed."

Dad hated any displays of emotion. "You disgust me," he would say to at least two wives if they cried. Perhaps it scared him; perhaps he sensed that if he ever allowed his own emotions to surface, they would swallow him up. I believe that early on Dad was taught that to be a "man" you had to disconnect from emotions like tenderness, intimate connection, and need—qualities associated with women. We have all seen how almost universal this is among men and at what price they forfeit these qualities. In my father's case, the masculine ethic may have been exacerbated by the example set by his father and rugged midwest-

ern stoicism. Like the Ogallala Aquifer that lies beneath the surface of the Sand Hills of his native Nebraska and occasionally pops through the topsoil to create lakes, Dad's buried "other self" surfaced in his gardening and his artistry: the painting, the needlepoint, his deeply sensitive portrayal of Tom Joad.

As a girl, I intuited the tensions playing themselves out inside him, like opposing forces on a battlefield. It was his underground softness that I loved, that I needed. In *I Don't Want to Talk About It*, psychologist Terrence Real says, "Sons don't want their fathers' 'balls'; they want their hearts." Daughters, too. If Dad could have embraced the sensitive part of himself full-time, he would have been happier, and so would several subsequent generations of us, for the belief system that undergirds the old notion of masculinity is a poison that runs deep. Dad learned the steps to the relational dance of patriarchy at his father's knee, as his father likely learned it from his father (though sometimes it's learned on mothers' knees), and its toxic legacy has continued across generations, until now. I am determined before I die to try to help change the steps of that dance—for myself, for my children, and for others.

Peter is all deep sweetness, kind and sensitive to his core. He would never intentionally harm anything or anyone. In fact, he once argued with me that vegetables had souls (it was the sixties). He has a strange, complex mind that grasps and hangs on to details ranging from the minutiae of his childhood to cosmic matters, with a staggering amount in between. Dad couldn't appreciate and nurture Peter's sensitivity, couldn't see him as he was. Instead he tried to shame Peter into his own image of stoic independence. Peter gets attached to people and animals. That summer at Ocean House he was always sifting through the sand underneath the beach club dressing rooms looking for money that might have dropped between the wooden slats. When he'd get enough coins he'd add it to his allowance and make a long-distance call back to the house in Greenwich to ask Katie about our family's six-year-old Dalmatian, Buzz. During one of those calls, he learned that Buzz had been put down without anyone asking us how we felt about it. Peter was deeply affected by this. I could hear him crying himself to sleep in his room next door. I, on the other hand, felt nothing much. Greenwich was, to all intents and purposes, a chapter about to be closed. We were going to be living in the city with Dad and Susan and . . . well, dogs in the city weren't practical.

Peter, throughout much of his school years, was faced with the taunting of schoolmates, the cruelty of boys toward peers who show signs of vulnerability as a means of proving their own unchallengeable entry into the world of "real men." It is to Peter's credit that he rarely caved. I marveled at the extent to which he would, in the face of Dad's anger, remain himself, exposing his heart, challenging Dad: "See me for who I am. I will not change in order to make you comfortable." I, on the other hand, was loath to be anything that would bring on my father's disapproval—until, at a later age, I realized that if I wanted his attention, disapproval was the best I could hope for.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HUNGER

*I had been hungry, all the Years—
My Noon had Come—to dine—
I trembling drew the Table near—
And touched the Curious Wine—
'Twas this on Tables I had seen—
When turning, hungry, Home
I looked in Windows, for the Wealth
I could not hope—for Mine— . . .*

*Nor was I hungry—so I found
That Hunger—was a way
Of persons outside Windows—
The Entering—takes away—
—EMILY DICKINSON, 1862*

THE HUNGER BEGAN that beach summer with Susan. That's when I moved "outside" myself full-time, and a perpetual, low-grade anxiety took up residence in the newly empty inside space. I didn't know where the anxiety came from. I just thought that was how life felt for a girl once she'd hit the you're-supposed-to-be-feminine age—feeling like an outsider, nose pressed against windows, hungry to get in, not knowing that it was myself I was outside of; but then, how could I be inside myself when I had discovered I was not perfect? Who'd want to be inside something imperfect? Before that summer, at age thirteen, the concept of "perfect" hadn't yet begun to darken my horizon—I was too busy climbing trees and wrestling. Now, on it came.

My feelings of imperfection centered on my body. It became my personal Armageddon, the outward proof of my badness: I wasn't thin enough. Thinking back, I am sure my mother's suicide had a role to play; after all, being superthin is a way to postpone womanliness, to put off victimhood: freedom through androgyny. Then, too, Mother had had ample obsessions of her own with body image. Certainly the fashion industry has a role to play in glorifying the emaciated-as-chic look, pushing *thin* down the throats of young girls just starting to work out their identities. But my father was implicated as well. Dad had an obsession with women being thin. The Fonda cousins have told me that this was true of all the men in the family, going back generations. On his deathbed, Douw Fonda asked his daughter Cindy, "Have you lost weight yet?" (She wasn't fat.) Eating disorders abound in Fonda women, and at least two of Dad's five wives suffered from bulimia. Once I hit adolescence, the only time my father ever referred to how I looked was when he thought I was too fat. Then it was always his wife who would be sent to let me know he was displeased, that he wanted me to wear a different, less revealing bathing suit, a looser belt, or a longer dress.

The truth is that I was never fat. But that wasn't what mattered. For a girl trying to please others, what mattered was how I saw myself—how I'd *learned* to see myself: through others' judgmental, objectifying eyes.

Maria Cooper Janis, a friend from childhood, told me once that when she was around age sixteen, she and her parents, Rocky and Gary Cooper, had come to our Malibu beach house for lunch. Apparently, while we were sitting on the beach, my father said to Rocky, "Jane's got the body, but Maria's got the face." I was stunned when Maria told me this, partly because her mother had repeated it to her, but mostly because it showed how judgmental Dad was—and willing to objectify me—even to other people.

Obviously the trouble is that wanting to be perfect is to want the impossible. We're mortal, after all; we're not meant to be perfect. Perfect is for God: *Completion*, as Carl Jung said, is what we humans should strive for. But completion (wholeness) isn't possible until we stop trying to be perfect. The tyranny of perfection forced me to confuse spiritual hunger with physical hunger.* This toxic striving for perfection is a female thing.

*I don't mean to suggest that all girls who strive for perfection and feel inadequate end up with an eating disorder, but too many do. Every decade 5.6 percent of people with

How many men obsess about being perfect? For men, generally, good enough is good enough.

Dad had decided that Peter and I should go to boarding school, as was common at the time for families who could afford it. Peter was enrolled at the Fay School for boys in Massachusetts and I at the Emma Willard School in Troy, New York. Starting my freshman year at Emma Willard, being very thin assumed dominance over good hair in the hierarchy of what really mattered.

I remember cutting out a magazine ad that said with \$2 and some box tops they would send you a special kind of gum that had tapeworm eggs in it and when you chewed it the worms would hatch and eat up all the food you consumed. It sounded like a splendid idea to me—a way to have your cake and eat it, too, so to speak. I sent in my \$2 and the box tops, but the gum never materialized. When I told this story to a friend recently, she said, "You're a smart girl, Jane. How did you get duped into believing this and sending in the money?" Because I was thirteen (hence immortal) and health wasn't a factor if it meant getting thin. I knew tapeworms weren't fatal. If it had been a bubonic virus I was sending away for, I'd have thought twice—maybe. But anything that would allow me to get thin without having to do something active seemed attractive. Mind you, I wasn't as extreme as a few other girls, who had to be hospitalized because they refused to eat, but I prided myself on being one of the thinnest in the class.

Then, in sophomore year, Carol Bentley, a wet-eyed brunette from Toledo, Ohio, entered Emma Willard and became my best friend. I remember first seeing her as I was stepping out of the dorm shower. She was naked and took my breath away. I had never seen a body like hers: fully developed breasts that stood straight out over a tiny waist, and narrow hips with long, chiseled legs like Susan's. I felt certain right then that she would end up running the world and that if I hung around long enough, some of her power would rub off on me. Already I had learned to equate the perfection of a woman's body with power and success.

anorexia/bulimia die, which is about twelve times higher than the annual death rate due to all causes of death among females ages fifteen to twenty-four in the general population. The deaths are usually due to complications related to the disease, such as cardiac arrest, electrolyte imbalance, or suicide (Melissa Spearing, "Eating Disorders: Facts About Eating Disorders and the Search for Solutions," National Institutes of Mental Health, NIH Publication No. 01-4901, [2001]). Feeling unwhole leads to other addictions besides those related to food. Psychologist Marion Woodman says, "An addiction is anything we do to avoid hearing the messages that body and soul are trying to send us."